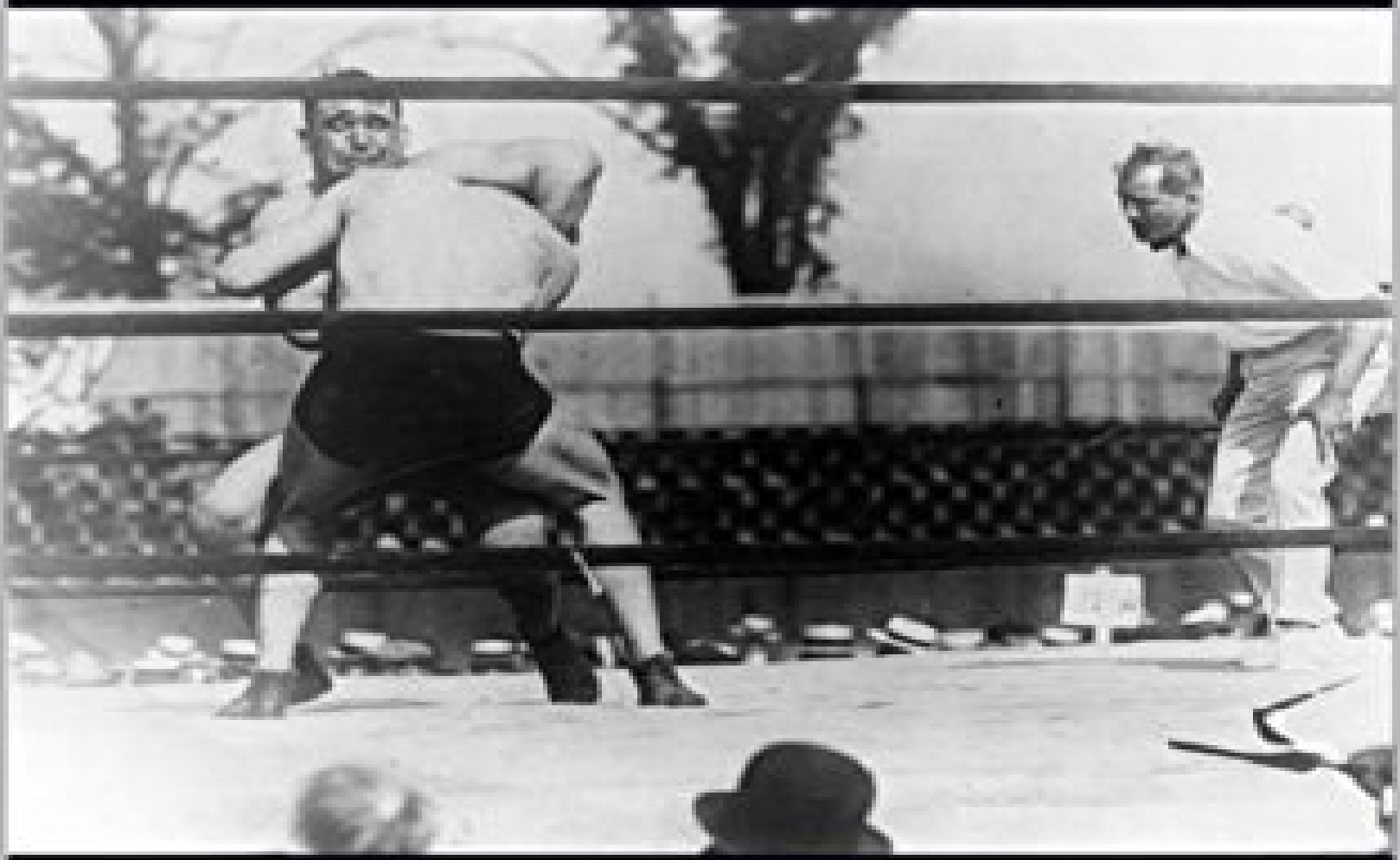
MARCUS GRIFFIN



Fall Guys

The Barnums of Bounce

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Chapter 1

It Happens Everywhere

You call it wrestling, they term it "working." It may be happening right in your own home town tonight. As Shakespeare once said: "A rose by any other name," *etc.*

By any name you choose to call it, wrestling is the roughest, most dramatic, and oftentimes the most hilarious sport before the American public today. Let's get together right now and attend one of the thousands of mat contests taking place tonight.

Mingled cheers and boos greet the two mat contestants as they come into the ring. Wrestling opponents usually enter the ring alone, without benefit of the seconds so common to pugilism. The timekeeper rings a loud gong to silence the spectators and the announcer walks to the center of the squared circle for the usual ritual expected by wrestling fans. Amid mingled boos, cheers and jeers, the announcer introduces the principals, Champion Gus Papadikis and Harry Furey, challenger. The weights of the principals and the rules governing the match are also stated. When these announcing details are concluded, the referee calls the antagonists to the center of the ring and while the spectators stamp impatiently, examines the wrestlers' bodies for evidence of grease and looks at their finger nails to make certain they are clipped short enough to prevent scratching.

Concluding his part in the bout's prologue, the arbiter motions the contestants back to their corners and signals to the timekeeper. That worthy rings the gong again and the match begins.

The echoes from the starting bell have hardly died away before the favorite is atop the champion, applying punishing holds. The titleholder's

face is a picture of pain. By resorting to unpardonable fouls the champion manages to free himself from his adversary's bone-breaking grips.

Papadikis crawls under the ropes like a frightened rabbit seeking shelter in a thorny hedge. The crowd boos. Furey remains inside the ropes in a menacing attitude, while the referee motions the champion to come back.

The spectators feel certain their boy is going to win. The local favorite is living up to expectations.

After a short breathing respite outside the hempen strands, the champion circles around the ring on the apron, crawls back through the ropes, advances to the center of the ring and again locks grips with Furey.

The crowd boos Papadikis as the champion punches the favorite in the ribs, knees him in the groin, rubs Furey's spine, twists his neck, gouges, heels, slaps, kicks, and resorts to more unpardonable fouls.

Meanwhile, if the referee knows his wrestling business, he'll threaten disqualifications, do a little punching on his own, scowl, shake his index finger, roll on the mat to get a closer view of the action and generally expend as much energy as the combatants.

But hell knows no fury like that of a clean type of wrestler aroused by an opponent's dirty tactics within the ring.

Amid cheers, encouraging shouts and hysterical advice from the spectators, Furey becomes the aggressor and Papadikis the craven.

The challenger applies arm locks, scissors holds, head locks, uses flying mares and generally bounces the crown wearer around the ring like a tennis ball. The crowd is receiving from the challenger a demonstration of the benefits to be accrued from clean living, skill and physical perfection.

The tide of the contest has definitely turned in favor of the challenger. During the following thirty minutes of the bout, Furey has everything his

own way. The crowd is pleased. It is witnessing an exciting melodrama with all the tried and true standard theatrical bits, including bravery, heroism, acrobatics, cowardice, comedy, clean living and the unexpected twists in the plot.

In the parlance of wrestling, “the heat is on.”

And this is the point in all standard wrestling scenarios where the “finish” occurs.

Sensing his opportunity, Furey throws caution to the winds and rushes in for the kill. Here’s where Papadikis demonstrates the stuff of which real champions are made.

As Furey comes in close, he is met by an apparently sickening punch to the jaw that knocks him sprawling to the ring mat.

Calling upon his physical resources, Papadikis manages to pick his almost unconscious antagonist from the mat, places the inert form across his broad shoulders, whirls Furey around several times, then slams him to the canvas, at the same time sprawling atop him and pinning Furey’s broad shoulders to the mat.

The excited referee counts three or five (a matter of local custom), then pats Champion Papadikis on his broad back as a signal to the crowd that the crown still rests secure on Gus’ bloody but somewhat bowed head.

The physically spent victor struggles dramatically to his feet amid the usual boos and cheers, while the prostrate subconscious challenger writhes on the canvas. The sympathetic referee helps Furey to his feet and the latter then manages to stagger to his own corner where more sympathetic persons help him on with his robe. As he leaves the ring, holding his jaw, the spectactors greet him with more cheers.

Papadikis and Furey meet on the steps leading down from the ring apron and the vanquished foe offers his hand to the victor. The champion

disdainfully ignores the proffer of congratulations and good fellowship, and the ever-alert spectators boo his unsportsmanshiplike attitude, as both wrestlers make their way up the aisles to the dressing room.

In the dressing room (and it must be borne in mind by the reader that bonecrushers usually dress and undress in one big room), the late contestants strip their tights off, shower, rub themselves down with oil and alcohol, dress, pack their bags and start out the door. The champion says:

"It was a good bout, Furey, let's hope the one in Harrisburg on Wednesday goes over just as big."

"Uh, huh!" the challenger grunts, "I'm working in a preliminary tomorrow night in Camden in a draw with Joe Rooney so I gotta get the twelve five. See you in Harrisburg."

Furey walks out.

If you were an onlooker at the struggle described between Papadikis and Furey you were merely witnessing one of the many hundreds of wrestling bouts staged every night in the week in the various cities, towns and hamlets from one end of America to another.

The principals call it "working a program," and the fans term it wrestling. Annually, thousands of persons afflicted with "wrestleritis" pour hundreds of thousands of dollars into the coffers of these behemoths who travel the country from coast to coast working their "programs."

Ninety-eight percent of those who pay their money to witness these gymnastic dramas and comedies believe it's on the level. It's probably the greatest entertainment spectacle today, containing acrobatics, comedy, buffoonery, pantomime, tragedy, interlude, curtain and afterpiece.

There are all the elements of the theatre, including the producer, publicity man, advance agent, stage manager and prompter.

Like Shakespeare's famed line, the wrestlers "suit the action to the word and the word to the action," and thus create in their bouts what is known as "heat," or as Pope expressed it, they "awake the soul by tender strokes of art."

Chapter 2

How It All Began

Within the past sixteen years professional wrestling has become the best organized professional sport in America. Baseball, hockey, boxing, tennis, golf and football have yet to achieve the degree of perfection in organization and the solidarity of unified action which prevails among the mat pachyderms.

These ring mastodons known as wrestlers, have organized their business far beyond the wildest dreams of those early grappling figures known as Frank Gotch, George Hackenschmidt, Earl Caddock, Fred Beale, Tom Jenkins, and other colorful personalities who zoomed across the catch-as-catch-can horizon early in this century.

Picture unheralded champions who draw bigger crowds than tennis racketeer Bill Tilden, actress Greta Garbo, fisticuffer Jack Dempsey, Mae West, and “Dynamite” Joe Louis, and consider raw-boned country bumpkins who are possessed of incomes of from twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars yearly, and you have in a nutshell professional wrestling, America’s most profitable and best organized sport.

It’s not the sport of kings, but the entertainment of the hoi polloi. Some two thousand heavyweight grapplers appear weekly in more than a thousand auditoriums throughout the United States and Canada, and those eight men behind the scenes who furnish the slam-bang style of pier six brawling to devotees of the scrambled-eared neckbenders garner a total yearly income of nearly ten millions of dollars.

In one short year in the United States, matman Danno O’Mahoney appeared in more towns and cities, drew more money, and wrestled before

more people than the highly touted and praise-agented “Dynamite” Joe Louis. During that period, after all expenses were deducted, O’Mahoney made one hundred and fifty thousand dollars clear for his own particular pocketbook. While Louis earned much more in the same period, training expenses and the division of his earnings among various piece men and racketeers who cut in on him, brought his net earnings to approximately one hundred thousand dollars. Pretty good pickings whether a wrestler or fighter, you might say, and true enough, but consider that the average pugilist’s and athlete’s professional career spans only ten years, while a “meat tosser” looks forward to forty years of active competition.

Stanislaus Zbyszko, John Killonis, Ed “Strangler” Lewis, Jim Londos, Joe Stecher, Fred Grubmier and Marian Plestina, just to name a few, were grappling when most of us were in swaddling clothes, but they continue today, like Barnum’s famed elephant, “bigga and betta” than ever.

Think of Woodrow Wilson, Jack Johnson, Gene Tunney, Calvin Coolidge, Jack Dempsey, Enrico Caruso, Benny Leonard, Blanche Sweet, Mickey Walker, Tommy Gibbons, Theda Bara and other public figures who have passed from the picture since those wrestlers first put on their tights, and you’ll realize their longevity.

Too, most fighters and theatrical performers are lucky indeed if they can average seventy-five dollars weekly during their periods of competition.

Chiselers and the primrose pathway get most of their money. It is not uncommon for a run of the mine neckbender to average one hundred and fifty dollars weekly over a period of twenty-five years. And because they wrestle so often and must be in reasonable shape, matmen drop very little of this long green along Heartbreak Boulevard.

Down through the pages of history have come stories of wrestling. It is the most elemental of sports. Homer twanged his lyre about the glories of Grecian matmen and even the Bible speaks of “grappling.”

As sports oracle Frank G. Menke points out in his accurate All Sports Record Book, it is difficult to approach the subject of present day wrestling without becoming facetious. The modern grapplers are such hoydenish fellows, who do such weird things, in utter conflict with all the sane rules of competition, that the obvious conclusion is the lads are just fooling. The mat boys have invented many melodramatic effects in their bouts that certainly arouse the fans, but on second and more sober thought, lead the spectator to wonder what it's all about and how they get that way. No matter how the wrestlers and promoters dodge the issue, the question of wrestling's honesty crops up. The fans who know of matmen meeting bonebreaking partners every night in the week, often inquire if the sport is on the level.

The ruling of the New York State Athletic Commission answers that by declaring that all mat contests, unless otherwise billed by authority of the Commission, are exhibitions only, and not matches or contests. The grappling industry doesn't mind this a bit so long as the fans pay their money at the box office to witness the catch-as-catch-can carnivals.

As the population of the world increased, so did the popularity of wrestling. It is a form of sport requiring no special equipment. In ancient Rome and Greece, bonecrushing was most popular and such contests were employed to settle national athletic supremacy. As far back as 511 B.C., history tells of Milo of Croton, of Athens, who was so strong that he could hurl a three hundred pound opponent twenty feet.

Those were the days when a matman was a big shot. Milo broke arms and legs like match sticks and the greater damage he did to an opponent, the more wildly he was cheered by the Athenians. Like the famed Paul Bunyan of our Wisconsin woods, Milo tore trees out of the ground by the roots, could carry a chariot on his head with six men seated in it, could kill an ox by punching it between the eyes, could gain a strangle hold on a bull and kill it without real effort, after which he would eat the raw meat. His appetite was such that an omelet of four dozen eggs failed to satisfy him. Milo finally came to a bad end through his own over-confidence. According to historians, he was out hiking in the Greek groves one fine afternoon and

came upon a huge tree. One of those trees only found in mythology. At any rate, Milo noticed that some wood choppers were trying to cut the tree down, and upon making inquiry, learned they had been at their task seven long years and had only managed to hew a quarter of the trunk away.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Milo in whatever prose the ancient Greeks used. "I'll split the tree down the center and you guys put the trunk of another tree in as a wedge and you'll be able to make faster progress in your labors."

It was no sooner said than done, and Milo, stripping to his leopard skin, split the tree in two with his bare hands and then stepped between the parted trunk and bid the workmen to put their wedge in. The wood-choppers were tardy, however, and before they could insert their wedge, which was probably as long and as wide as the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, Milo's strength gave out, the tree snapped together and the great athletic hero was crushed to death. His remains were devoured by hungry wolves who came upon his corpse while the workmen were away from the scene seeking aid for their luckless strong man. Even the women of the ancient world wrestled (as they do today). Vases from ancient Greece, dug out of the ruins show the handiwork of the fair sex and always the favorite poses were those of the matmen.

The Emerald Isle, too, has its wrestling heroes who antedated the present bonecrushers known as Danno Mahoney and Steve "Crusher" Casey. Perhaps the best known of the Celtic grapplers was Terence O'Houlihan Griffin. Misty Irish folklore does not reveal whether or not he was a member of the author's family.

At any rate, Terence O'Houlihan Griffin was, of course, one of the many Irish kings. He was so strong he could hold himself at arm's length. Scooped gaps through the Wicklow Mountains with his bare hands. Exercised his youngest son by playing catch with him, using huge boulders the size of the Empire State Building. Was faster than the storm winds sweeping over the Gaelic coast, and in wrestling battle-royals, would take on ten thousand men at a time and pin them all with one swoop of his big

hand. According to fable it was nothing for Terence to swing bulls above his head and hurl them for miles, and twenty of the greatest ships, in full rigging hooked to his immense body, couldn't budge him one inch. Such deeds as knocking down steers with a blow of his fist were beneath him. He left those minor exercises to his younger sons and daughters who needed the training. Terence's epic brawl with Roy Neal, which lasted ten years, without either drawing breath, left many a landmark on the Emerald Isle in the form of huge rock mounds, made when the contestants hurled boulder after boulder at each other.

It seems it all started when Neal expressed a desire to marry one of Terence's daughters and the irate parent objected to the advances. It all ended with a truce, Neal had his way, and the resulting progeny was Brian Baru, greatest of all Irish wrestlers and strong men.

William J. "Bill" Walshe, of the Toronto, Canada, Mail and Empire, points out that grappling is a universal sport. Its very elemental background makes it understandable to the spectator who has never before witnessed contests.

Grappling is followed by every nationality from Occident to Orient and by all classes of people from kings to cannibals. On all continents where there is wrestling, different rules govern the game. Different countries have their favorite sports. The United States glories in baseball; Spain in its bull fighting and Jai Alai; Canada has its ice hockey and lacrosse; the English like their soccer; the French enthuse over tennis and fencing; New Zealand and Australia follow their cricket and rugger teams; Ireland boasts of its boxers; the Swiss, Norwegians and other people of colder countries specialize in winter sports; most nations patronize horse racing, but the wrestling game only is followed and played by all. Wrestling is a natural heritage, the primate play of men that will probably last until the sound of the final trumpet—and continue on into the next world. The sport is older than history, in comparison all other games are new inventions, with the exception of foot racing, which also goes back to ancient history. Most of our popular sports date back to a few years before our grandfathers. Golf,

which is called the “royal and ancient game,” is a babe in arms compared to wrestling.

The first records of wrestling are tabulated in stone, told in tradition, ancient history and biblical stories. Homer, the immortal, was perhaps the first wrestling reporter. He covered the bout between Ajax and Odysseus. The exact date of the origin of wrestling cannot be ascertained, but it must have started with man, and the finish match between Cain and Abel was probably the first catch-as-catch-can grappling battle.

When the archaeologists dug deep for the ruined cities they located signs of the wrestling sport. King Tut was a rabid ringsider. The walls of the temple tombs of Beni and Hasan near the Nile are sculptured with scenes depicting wrestling matches. In fact, there is evidence of the sport since 3,000 years before the Christian era. Wrestling was introduced at the 18th Olympiad about 704 B.C. Sukune, the model of Japanese grapplers, was undisputed champion in 23 B.C. Other countries had their grappling gods just as today.

Along with the heroes there were the matchmakers of old. They promoted the sport before most of the present-day games were even conceived. Perhaps the big bouts of today seem huge, but the most important ever decided, for the richest wrestling purse, was when the Japanese Emperor Buntoku, in 858 A.D., had his twin sons wrestle for his throne; and Koreshito, the winner, succeeded as heir.

There have been three different styles of wrestling through the ages. Graeco-Roman, a combination of ancient Greek and Roman grappling, which is now seen only in Europe and the Olympic games; jiu-jitsu, originated in Japan; and catch-as-catch-can, the mode that prevails in the U.S.A., which has devotees throughout the world.

Since a time preceding the Christian era, wrestling has been the national sport of Japan, with the gigantic Sumo wrestler ever present and ready to grapple at a fete for the Emperor, or at any festive public ceremony.

The sons of Sumo wrestlers married the daughters of Sumo wrestlers for more than twenty centuries, the idea being that the mating would result in sons of tremendous bulk and power. It has. The average male Sumo offspring, having reached maturity, often is five feet nine inches in height—exceptional for a son of Nippon —and the weight has scaled between three and four hundred pounds.

Wrestling tournaments in Japan started about 25 B.C. The modern events continue for eleven days. A contest ends when (a) one man has thrown his opponent to the floor; (b) when he has caused the other to touch the floor with hands or knee; or (c) when one has forced his opponent's feet beyond the "ring" boundary.

Here in the United States the outstanding statesmen were devotees of the art of neckbending. George Washington, Daniel Boone, David Crockett, and Sam Houston were all noted participants in bonecrushing bouts.

Even Abraham Lincoln stood out as a grappler, long before the other phases of public life beckoned, and it is said he carried a slightly cauliflowered ear to his grave.

Lincoln wrestled all over the Mississippi and Ohio river country, his career beginning at nineteen, in New Orleans, in 1828, and continuing until affairs of state prevented him from defending his mat laurels further.

Honest Abe took on all comers and never required any man to post forfeits to guarantee appearance. His only medal was the huge, cauliflowered left ear he carried to eternal rest.

Lincoln's outstanding championship match took place when he threw Dan Needham, two straight falls, at Coles County, Illinois.

Abe must have had, according to best perusal of ancient wrestling records, some three hundred matches in all and was never defeated.

History tells us that General U. S. Grant particularly liked grappling. When General Robert E. Lee strode into Grant's tent at Appomattox to arrange terms for the Confederate surrender, it is recounted that Grant apologized for the untidy condition of his headquarters.

"Pay no attention to things, Bob," he said, "me and some of the boys were having a wrestling match in here last night."

Chapter 3

The Peerless Champion

Frank Gotch, often called “the peerless champion,” is credited with being the outstanding of all the modern day grapplers. He was born in Humboldt, Iowa, on April 27, 1878, of German-Indian-Austrian parentage. He made his professional debut in 1899, and within a few years, according to authority Frank Menke, “he scaled the heights from obscurity to greatness.”

Gotch gained the title in 1904 by throwing Tom Jenkins. He lost the crown in 1906 to Fred Beall, when Beall pitched him against a ring post and Gotch was knocked unconscious. This bout was one of the first of the many “business” matches in which Gotch was to engage afterwards with various opponents.

Previous to this time, the late William Muldoon, so-called “greatest Roman of them all,” had tangled in many a business contest with Ernie Rober, Tom Jenkins and others, but Gotch started the ball rolling which was, in later years, to spawn our present wrestling business.

In commenting on Muldoon’s part in the mat game, the Saturday Evening Post said that in the Muldoon period, fighting was illegal in all except the most loose and licentious localities, while wrestling was considered a just and civilized test of skill and strength.

Muldoon profited by the outlawing of the brutal boxing game and amassed a fortune at his profession; he died in 1933, full of honors and deep in his eighties, a member of the New York Athletic Commission, the proprietor of a famous health resort for renovating tired tycoons, and immortalized in fiction by Theodore Dreiser as “Culhane, the Solid Man.”

In Muldoon's day the stage was an additional avenue of profits for a champion. Muldoon made large weekly salaries with vaudeville and variety turns, and turned definitely to art when Modjeska made her triumphal Shakespearean invasion.

Muldoon toured America with Modjeska as Charles, the wrestler, in *As You Like It*. So sport discovered Shakespeare long before Gene Tunney went into culture and several decades before Bernard Shaw discovered the men of brawn.

To Muldoon goes the credit of engaging in one of the first mixed matches on record, being that of a combination wrestling and boxing bout between "The Solid Man" and John L. Sullivan.

The bout was staged in a Gloucester, Massachusetts ball park in 1887, before a crowd of many thousands. Sullivan started out with an edge, punching Muldoon to the ground, but "The Greatest Roman" scrambled to his feet, wristlocked Jawn, then shifting to the hold now known as a body slam, hurled the Boston Strong Boy to the earth, where he lay stunned for several seconds, unable to toe the scratch. The spectators then prevented the bout continuing, best two out of three, and Muldoon was acclaimed the victor, to Sullivan's rage and chagrin.

For the readers' information it might be noted here that oftentimes fans have argued whether a wrestler could defeat a fighter in a mixed bout. It is the opinion of such stalwarts as "Strangler" Lewis, Jack Dempsey, Benny Leonard and Dean Detton, that the contest would be unequal, with the matman having the upper hand.

A recent bout of this kind took place when King Levinsky, heavyweight boxer, and Ray Steele, heavyweight wrestler, met in St. Louis, Nov. 20, 1935, before twelve thousand persons, to determine what would happen if a boxer met a wrestler. Each man to his own trade. Levinsky swung for Steele's chin, missed, Steele grabbed him, dumped him, pinned him—total time of bout thirty-five seconds. That should answer that.

Gotch took the mat title back from Beall in 1906, having just put the crown in moth balls, as it were, so he could dispose of several opponents. He reigned as heavyweight king until 1912, when, after defeating Lurich, the Russian giant, Gotch retired and announced:

Through all my years as champion, I have wrestled every man who had ambitions to become champion—and I have defeated every foeman. I have given as many chances to all of them as they wanted. There seems no one left for me to wrestle, so, after 13 years on the mat, I am retiring to my farm.

He never did wrestle again, although some time afterward he was induced to attempt a comeback, went into training, broke a leg and returned to his farm where he died a few years later. It is odd, indeed, that Gotch's ring career should have come to an end by a broken leg, the same kind of an injury he had so often inflicted on hapless opponents.

Before passing from Gotch, it might be well here to note that the Humboldt, Iowa thunderbolt was the first of the wrestlers to employ a policeman, or a protector, to curb and test tough opponents before Gotch met them in grappling combat.

"The Peerless Champion," as so many are wont to term him, had at his beck and call Doctor Benjamin Roller, capable enough as a matman, but totally lacking in the color necessary to pull the fans in at the box office. Emil Klank, manager of Gotch, therefore used Roller as a buffer.

Harking back to the usually accurate Saturday Evening Post, that journal says Roller was a very skilled athlete, versed in all the cunning of his trade, but he lacked the poundage necessary for the exigencies of championship matters. In 1910 he and Gotch toured the country for four months, meeting all comers. Doctor Roller then was fifty years of age, but he wrestled 191 men, threw each of them within fifteen minutes, and won the $250 stake offered for each contest.

In the same year, Doctor Roller wrestled Stanislaus Zbyszko in Vienna and was pinned to the mat. During his training period, however, Doctor Roller managed to find time to study under Professor Ehrlich at Frankfort. He returned to America without victory, but with his scientific knowledge increased.

Doctor Roller was always an enigma to his managers and opponents. He regarded wrestling with a lukewarm eye and would wander away from the railway station in any tank town to argue with the village doctor about infections and contagious diseases. After Gotch's definite retirement, the good doctor returned to medicine.

It would be nice to say that Gotch was a kindly and equable gentleman who held his own ability in intellectual contempt. The fact is that he was short-tempered, and as irritable as a hibernating bear. He considered himself as important as a United States senator and his manners were very little better.

Suffice to say here that time has added to the aura of Gotch's mat glory. While there is no disputing the fact Gotch was capable enough to handle most opponents, there is considerable doubt as to whether his ability transcended that of Joe Stecher, Ed "Strangler" Lewis, Stanislaus Zbyszko, Joe "Toots" Mondt, and others who followed him along the scrambled ear pathway.

Gotch, according to the old timers, was a supreme bluffer who went his merry successful bonebreaking way because he did "business" with the more capable bonecrushers whom he met and dominated the lesser lights through a fiendish delight in breaking bones and maiming less fortunate and skilled adversaries.

Passing up Gotch without first recounting the highlights of his amazing career would leave the reader befogged as to later whys and wherefores in the wrestling business.

Gotch not only made the world sit up and take notice of grappling, but as the best managed and best protected of any bonecrusher who ever lived, he was enabled, at his death in December, 1917, to leave a fortune of nearly half a million dollars and a fine farm.

"The Peerless Champion" came to the attention of Farmer Burns, famous trainer of athletes and a wrestler of no mean ability himself, during April, of 1899, after Dan McLeod, a topflight matman of the era, ventured into Gotch's hometown of Humboldt to tangle with the rural pride and was soundly trounced for his pains.

Burns decided to have a look at "the pride," and in December of the same year he matched himself with the Humboldt Thunderbolt at Fort Dodge, Iowa. The Farmer won, but Gotch pressed him to the limit. Burns and his wrestling board of strategy decided to take the youngster under their wings and train him for bigger and better fields. Gotch had many minor bouts under the Burns aegis, until in 1900, the Farmer received word of great monies to be cleaned up in the Klondike, where the miners were "bugs" on grappling and a Dawson City pride named Anderson was meeting and throwing all comers. Bert Collyer, later a Chicago sports editor of note and now publisher of the Collyer's Eye, racing and sports sheet, and Joe Ollie Marsh (of whom we shall hear more in later chapters) were barnstorming in Alaska with Anderson, and wrote back glowing accounts to various wrestlers regarding the gold dust to be acquired by a good matman who might give Anderson a tussle.

Burns and his partners decided to act, so, under the name of Frank Kennedy, the peerless champion was shipped to the Yukon. But by some devious means, Collyer and Marsh received advance word of the caliber of the man expected, and as Gotch's boat, bearing him into Alaskan waters, was making ready to dock, a ship passed them on the way out with Anderson aboard.

Collyer and Marsh had spread the word of Gotch's coming and the luckless Humboldt, Iowa lad found himself unable to secure worthwhile mat contests with lucrative side bets.

He managed to toss a few camp bullies, but himself came a cropper when he agreed to a mixed wrestling and boxing bout with a saloon hanger-on, unheralded in the gold gulches, named Frank Slavin. It was a winner-take-all proposition, with a wealthy sourdough backing Gotch to the limit. The Humboldt Thunderbolt went to the cleaners, Slavin administering a terrible beating to him and then knocking him out.

Gotch took the first spring boat back to Seattle.

Returning home, Burns again took the greenhorn in hand. After wrestling his protege in several matches as a buildup, Burns was defeated in one at Bellingham, Washington, on October 5, 1903. Gotch defeated Burns again in December of the same year, in January of 1904 defeated Tom Jenkins, then one of America's greatest matmen, had several minor buildup bouts between and then came into international prominence in August and October of 1904, by decisively beating Dan McLeod. With these victories under his belt, Gotch was established as a drawing card and the mat game developed into the greatest attention getter of all sports prominent in that era. With Farmer Burns and Emil Klank, another wrestler, as his managers, and Jenkins, McLeod, and Yankee Rodgers to run interference against tough opposition and to prevent "The Thunderbolt" from falling into traps set by grappling enemies, Gotch soared to heights from which he has never tumbled.

In the years that followed he frequently met Burns, Jenkins, McLeod, and Klank, in advertised matches, but so well was he exploited, and so sold was wrestling fandom on his prowess, that his earnestness and sincerity of purpose were never questioned.

Examination of his record shows almost a thousand championship bouts and many more exhibitions engaged in with his record almost unsullied. No other grappler of modern times can produce a mat history equally impressive.

Gotch won the American title on January 28, 1904, from Tom Jenkins, at Bellingham, Washington. A huge crowd witnessed the bout, with both contestants dishing out liberal doses of fouls and roughhouse slugging, hardly coming under the head of scientific wrestling.

Present day wrestling enthusiasts reading newspaper accounts of Gotch's many bouts will realize that the Humboldt Horror differed only slightly from his present day prototypes, with the exception that Dean Detton, Everett Marshall, Lee Wycoff and Ed Don George use more wrestling holds and appear more scientific. Today, with wire services giving newspapers daily accounts of wrestling results, the modern bonecrushers must perforce wrestle with more caution.

In Gotch's day the result of a bout usually remained the private property of the local fans and newspaper readers. Only the biggest matches were covered by the nationally prominent newspapers and wire services.

Gotch continued his merry way with the American title, breaking the legs of setups, maiming luckless inferior grapplers, and striking terror into the hearts of foreign foemen through advance buildups. He was not only the greatest drawing card in wrestling, but the most feared.

"The Peerless Champion" see-sawed back and forth with his mangled ear bauble, generally being acclaimed champion, with only George Hackenschmidt of Europe to dispute his claim of world champion. Inasmuch as Gotch had cleaned up all opposition in America, and in his day there were no state athletic commissions to dispute his claim to the world title, he was pretty generally accepted by the American public as world titleholder.

Gotch wrestled through tournaments, appeared in handicap bouts, threw various opponents all in the same ring in the same night, and generally barnstormed throughout America, cleaning up in side bets and purses. Only the limited means of transportation of that era prevented him from emulating present day bonecrushers and wrestling every night in the week.

Consummate showman was Gotch, and nothing better illustrates this than his matches with Beall and Stanislaus Zbyszko.

Gotch was running out of opponents when he met Beall in New Orleans on December 1, 1906. The bout ended with a victory for the lighter Marshfield, Wisconsin, opponent when Gotch was "pitched" against a ring post and was unable to continue. The newspapers went to town on the popular badger state grappler's victory, and just sixteen days later, both met again, this time in Kansas City—even to this day, a great wrestling town—on December 17, 1906, before a capacity house, and Gotch won back his laurels after a "Titan" struggle.

Wrestling today, ruled over by state athletic commissions, and conducted on a more business-like plane, causes sports writers to lift their eyebrows with suspicion whenever any undue excitement attends a mat contest. But in the days of "The Peerless Champion," he and his stalwart cohorts literally "got away with murder."

Today a ring-around-the-rosy like the Beall matches would be termed by present sports oracles as mere gate hypos, in that time nothing untoward was suspected.

Gotch pulled one of his many showmanly stunts, similar to the Beall thing, when he lost a one fall handicap match to Stanislaus Zbyszko in Buffalo, New York, in November, 1909. The praise agents got to work on that one and beat the ballyhooey drums. Almost any town would have been willing to see a return between the titleholder (Gotch's had not been at stake, by agreement, in the Buffalo fiasco), but Chicago got the "plum."

Frank made short work of his Polish adversary when the title was put on the line in the Chicago Coliseum on the night of June 1, 1910. Walking to the center of the ring after the referee had given his instructions, Gotch stretched out his hand as if to shake that of Zbyszko, the latter fell for the ruse, and next thing the booing and jeering spectators, who filled the house to capacity, knew, the luckless Pole had been hurled over Gotch's head with a flying mare and pinned to the canvas in the record time of six seconds.

Controversy rages to this day, however, around the two bouts Gotch engaged in with George Hackenschmidt. The first took place in Chicago, at the Dexter Park Pavilion, in the Stock Yards, on the south side of the windy city, on April 3, 1908. The olfactory odor from the Yards has never since equaled that left by the contest's aftermath. It was one of the most disgraceful exhibitions ever witnessed by a capacity audience of enthusiastic mat devotees, and it started the ball rolling down through the years toward the general discrediting of wrestling and grapplers.

The late Ed Smith, famous Chicago sports editor of the American, and noted throughout America as a referee of ability, acted as arbiter. Hackenschmidt received the rawest deal ever accorded a visiting foreign athlete defending his leg of the championship title. It was evident the Gotch crowd wanted to win an undisputed claim to the championship, and the Humboldt Horror started right out for blood by gouging, heeling, slugging, biting and kneeing his foreign adversary.

The match went slightly over two hours, and broke up in a riot, with "Hack" walking off the mat and refusing to continue the contest. In the dressing room, the half-blinded Hack exhibited his brutal injuries and showed his inflamed eyes, caused, so he said, by Gotch's penchant for poking his thumbs into them during the bout.

Though the partisan Gotch press at the time termed Hackenschmidt a quitter, the Russian Lion claims to this day he was jobbed in his two bouts with the vicious American kingpin.

In a recent statement in the Manchester News of England, Hackenschmidt, after all these years have passed and Gotch has gone to whatever reward wrestlers receive, said:

I never thought I would have to cope with foul means to gain my ends. After our match started I found it was impossible for me to get a grip on Gotch's body, he was so well oiled. I asked the referee to stop the match and make us both take hot baths before we continued. Smith just signaled

for me to continue the bout. Gotch was so oily it was impossible to get a hold on him, and handling him was like coping with a well-buttered eel.

He was a slippery mass of mountainous flesh. What bothered me was the referee was indifferent to what was being put across on me. The only thing I could do was to go on and make as good a showing as possible under such conditions. From the start to the end of the bout I had to rub my hands on my tights to get rid of the grease that came out of Gotch's hide. My wrestling costume was soon as greasy as Gotch's body, but I couldn't rid myself of the oil which was oozing out of his pores.

Gotch's thumbs and fingers were constantly hovering near my eyes and when our heads came together he rubbed his hair into my eyes so that some terrible chemical exuded from his hair and trickled into my eyes, causing intense pain and blinding me.

And the match went on with Gotch getting worse in his tactics. He gouged me and pulled my hair and yet no word of protest was raised by the referee, in there presumably in the interests of fair play and American sportsmanship.

After two hours my body was exhausted, I could scarcely breathe or swallow, I was done in, trying to cope with conditions that were a disgrace to Gotch and his country. So in the end I pushed Gotch aside and walked off the mat and Gotch won, but I wasn't beaten by Gotch, but by the oil which had been rubbed into his body during his many months of training for the bout with me.

As for Gotch, when Hackenschmidt made the same statement in substance (as given years later) after the bout, the Humboldt Horror sneered and went his merry wrestling, betting way.

Chapter 4

The Champion Off Guard

The Peerless Champion toured England and Europe after the first Hackenschmidt fiasco, garnered untold purses breaking the legs of unwary and luckless opponents and, after the second tussle with "Hack," which took place in the White Sox Ball Park in Chicago, Labor Day, September 4, 1911, wrestled until 1912, broke his leg and retired, undefeated, as World's Champion.

The second Hack bout, the repercussions of which can still be heard among mat moguls, will be covered in a later chapter of this work, inasmuch as the details are of more intimate concern in the lives of persons who are still glorifying this green earth.

Gotch wanted to enjoy the fruits of his wrestling labors and yet hold onto the title earnings during his retirement, and figured, with his managerial partners, that the best way to do this would be to appoint a successor. He named Jesse Westergard and Henry Ordeman as logical contenders, ordering them to wrestle and the winner to be named titleholder by royal Gotch proclamation. Ordeman won, was in turn tossed by Charlie Cutler in 1914 and the latter became the generally recognized titleholder.

Cutler cleaned up all opposition of any consequence and failing in his efforts to persuade "Hack" to come to America for a return bout under "fair" conditions, he began casting around in green pastures for profitable opposition. He soon had his wish gratified.

Into Minneapolis, where Cutler headquartered, came rumblings of some greenhorns out in Dodge City, Nebraska, who had a likely looking farm kid they believed could grapple the like as had never before been seen.

Cutler sent out scouts, learned the promising youngster was a mere kid named Joe Stecher, who, however, possessed the lucrative backing of betting hungry farmers, and agreed to tangle with the Dodge City, Nebraska, youngster.

Born in Dodge City in 1896, Stecher had dubbed around in various sports besides wrestling. His brother, a Navy champion, persuaded young Joe to take up the sport seriously, and at the age of 19, the lad was a formidable foeman for any grappler in America. He was managed in his mat maneuverings by his brother Anton, better known as Tony. The latter is today a promoter of wrestling matches in Minneapolis.

Getting back to Stecher, his fame rested upon the scissors hold, a grip which consists in locking the legs around an opponent's body until crackling sounds announce broken bones and the complete subjugation of the adversary.

It was then, even as now, a matter of common talk that Cutler would never have ventured out into Stecher's territory for a title bout if he hadn't understood from close friends that Stecher was a person hardly rated as a first class matman and that Stecher and his manager brother, Tony Stecher, would talk "business." Cutler entered the lion's den and was promptly eaten up. It was in July, 1915, when Stecher won over Cutler in straight falls in 29 minutes.

Friends who had wagered thousands and mortgaged their homes to place bets upon Cutler, because of the latter's assurance, lost their all.

Stecher was the wrestling Lion of the Hour and eager mat manipulators tried to entice the retired Gotch to tangle with the new sensation. The Humboldt hoyden didn't refuse, he merely demanded an impossible guarantee, and there the matter rested.

The wrestling game didn't really begin to fall into disrepute, however, despite Gotch's enthusiastic efforts to push the sport into oblivion via bouts

with Hackenschmidt, until Stecher and Earl Caddock, “the man of a thousand holds,” tangled in Omaha, on April 9,1917.

Again the unsuspecting friends and supporters of a wrestling king were taken into camp by the sharpers. Ranch men and farmers, who had seen Stecher apply his famed scissors hold to luckless opponents were convinced that not a living man had a chance to beat their Nebraska pride and joy. Imagine their consternation when Stecher lost.

The Stecher-Caddock bout has always remained one of the unexplained matdom mysteries. Joe won the first fall shortly after the half hour mark, and Caddock the second after nearly an hour and forty minutes of tugging. Then it was that Stecher threw down the many friends who had been betting on him by refusing to come out of his dressing room for the third and deciding fall. Caddock was named victor by “default.”

The United States’ entry into the World War brought wrestling promotions and competition to a temporary halt. Caddock was serving overseas with distinction while Stecher did his bit in the navy.

At the end of the War, however, a wrestling combination was formed which became known in matdom as “The Big Four,” consisting of Jack Curley, Tony Stecher, Stanislaus Zbyszko and Earl Caddock. Under the big four banner some of the most lucrative matches in the east were promoted.

Joe and Earl played many a return date throughout the United States and they wrestled before packed houses every time. Sometimes they appeared against each other and again they might oppose “tough” opponents on the same card. The Stecher-Caddock bouts became virtual theatrical road companies and could be likened to Sarah Bernhardt or Ellen Terry’s farewell appearances. Their most frequent adversaries were the two Zbyszko brothers, Stanislaus and the younger Wladek.

Be it said here to the credit of Caddock, that no man alive ever distinguished himself more in the American service during the World War and returned more modestly to resume his bone breaking activities. He

came back to America after the Armistice, broken in health and spirit and soon proved easy prey to the connivers in the mat sport. He lost his crown to Stecher in 1920, but his fame as a gentleman and square shooter with his friends will remain green so long as wrestlers grab for each other's necks.

When Stecher regained his title from Caddock, the fun was just beginning in American wrestling. It soon became apparent that the bonecrushers would rather bury a knife than an old grudge and the traps and pitfalls for the unwary champions were many.

The mat game was becoming an increasingly odious sport. The connivance between various contestants and the public's loss of faith had virtually wrecked the game everywhere but in a few isolated spots. Even the houses were falling off in New York City, the "Big Four" Citadel.

The wrestling game became the smelliest sport in the world, and yokels were taken into camp by droves. The word "wrestler" became synonymous with "gypper." Authorities drove matmen and their henchmen out of towns with warnings "never to come back." The game indeed entered the doldrums.

New faces, new champions and new manipulators were needed to re-instill public confidence. They appeared upon the mat horizon in the persons of Ed "Strangler" Lewis, Billy Sandow and "Toots" Mondt.

Lewis and Sandow had been dubbing around the Midwest, with occasional flurries eastward, and while Lewis' record was not too good, yet he showed a remarkable series of good performances for one so new in the catch-as-catch-can racket. He became acquainted with Sandow through a peculiar chain of circumstances.

Sandow, noted as a manager of wrestlers, ventured into Louisville, Kentucky, on the eve before the famed Blue Grass Derby.

Sandow was then guiding the mat destinies of Doctor Benjamin Roller, and one Yussif Hussane, advertised as "The Terrible Turk."

A last minute disappointment in the opponent who was to meet Yussif sent Sandow and promoter Jack Herman scrambling through the town for an adversary so the match could be staged as scheduled.

An amateur wrestler named Robert Julius Fredericks was finally selected for the sacrificial goat. Fredericks agreed to lose to Yussif. As a matter of fact, the thought of the greenhorn ever having a chance of winning never entered the heads of either Sandow or Herman. They took it for granted that Yussif was the great matman he had so effectively demonstrated himself to be on many occasions.

Life began for Herman, Sandow, Fredericks and Yussif at ten o'clock on the evening of the match. Just before the contestants were scheduled to enter the ring for their bout, Herman and Sandow came to the dressing room of Fredericks and Sandow said:

"Now, Bob, Yussif has to catch a train out of here by eleven o'clock because he's wrestling tomorrow night in Chicago. The Turk says to tell you to make it a good bout, but make it short and sweet. Lose to him two falls in twenty minutes so he and I won't miss the train."

Fredericks rebelled.

"You fellows listen to me," he said. "I'm working down here as a wrestling coach. There are people here tonight who expect me to give a good account of myself. If I lose two falls in twenty minutes to this fellow it may mean the loss of my job and many friends. I haven't told my friends I'm going to win, but I expect to make a showing so they won't be disappointed in me."

Sandow was enraged.

"You ingrate," shouted Sandow. "Do you want Yussif to go in there and kill you? He'd take you anyway."

“Okeh,” answered Fredericks. “If that’s the way you three feel, then you tell Yussif for me we’ll level, and tell him to try and get two falls in twenty minutes.”

Sandow hurried back to the Turk’s dressing room and conveyed the startling information to his wrestler. Be it said to the credit of Yussif he signified his willingness to go through with the match as scheduled. Fredericks defeated him and a new mat figure was born to wrestling history.

Three days later Sandow showed up in Chicago with a new competitor for the grapplers to cope with. He was, of course, none other than Robert Julius Fredericks, of Nekoosa, Wisconsin, who had changed his name to “Ed ‘Strangler’ Lewis.”

Through the years he ranked not only as a topflight grappler, many times world’s champion, but present day wrestling history revolves around Sandow, Lewis and Mondt, the latter a wrestler who entered the mat picture a few years later.

After his new found fame, Lewis toured with the Zack Miller, 101 Ranch Wild West Show. He needed opponents to go through his training stunts which he put on for the edification of the customers. Farmer Burns, the one time great mat king and then instructor of wrestlers at his famous Kansas training farm, sent a raw-boned kid named Joseph Mondt to Sandow.

“He’s a big kid, but knows the game. He’s as good a wrestler as you’ll find. We call him ‘Toots,’” Burns wrote to Sandow. “He’s got a good head on him, too, and if you give him a chance he’ll develop, not only into a great wrestler, but he’ll be a help to you in the business.”

Sandow, Lewis and Mondt became known as the “Gold Dust Trio,” and when they entered the bonecrushing picture as a relay team, the fun began in wrestling.

Chapter 5

The Gold Dust Trio

Lewis and Sandow had been buffeted around by the eastern combination, “The Strangler” being denied championship recognition when he beat all comers in a tournament staged by Jack Curley during the War.

With the advent of “Toots” Mondt to the Sandow-Lewis team, the rise of “The Strangler” not only became rapid, but the gates zoomed to undreamed of heights. Lewis snared the title from Stecher on December 13, 1920, at the Seventy-first Regiment Armory, and the march to wrestling prosperity for Sandow, Lewis and Mondt thereupon began.

Lewis’ advent as titleholder started the biggest sports combine ever controlled by three men and made fortunes for those interested.

The wrestling services of Lewis and Mondt were always in demand, but the haphazard methods of the mat promoters made it impossible for them to accept many proffered dates. Each promoter was working independently of promoters in other cities.

This prevented the building up of suitable opponents for Lewis and Mondt and ruined many mat cards already advertised for other cities.

Too, most of the professional neckbenders of the period were doing their own business.

At times, though signed for an important bout in say, Kansas City on September seventh, that with proper promotion and publicity would draw a big gate, the wrestler might also sign a contract to wrestle on September

first in let us say, St. Louis. If he were defeated it meant the card for September seventh in Kansas City was ruined.

Mondt's fertile brain conceived the plan of managing, promoting wrestlers and wrestling bouts on the same scale as vaudeville was booked and staged. Sandow was quick to grasp the import and possibilities of Mondt's ideas and at once set to work.

Sandow had the appearance and the necessary background to meet people and transact business. Lewis and Mondt handled the wrestling end.

Within a few months after the triumvirate of Sandow, Lewis and Mondt had been formed, the trio had moved wrestling from burlesque theaters and ratty hideaways into the finest auditoriums in America.

Lewis and Sandow had been mere stooges doing the bidding of the eastern combination known as "The Trust," which was the outgrowth of the many Gotch, Stecher, Caddock and Cutler matches.

Jack Herman of Chicago and Buffalo, and Joe Coffey of Chicago, were minor lieutenants in the "Big Four" group.

The wily Mondt at once began laying his lines to smash the dominance of this combination. It took only a few months for him to succeed and he did it by changing wrestling style and methods of promotion.

Perhaps no greater student of modern wrestling exists than Joe "Toots" Mondt. Effective holds, sensitive nerve centers, leverage, balance, feints and strength development were all an early part of his schooling.

He knew the background and history of every form of competitive sport and sought to apply this knowledge to the furtherance of wrestling. He wasn't long in finding a solution.

He recalled the history of an early bare knuckle fighter, one James Figg, who dated back to 1716. Mondt dug around in a library until he unearthed

printed proof of Figg's fame and went to Sandow with his data. Sandow read the information with interest.

He learned that Figg had been famed throughout England as a swordsman, wrestler and all around athlete from his boyhood. Figg had also gained fame in the British Isles as a fighter. His method was unique.

Instead of confining himself to pure and undiluted grappling, Figg would bang a rival with his fist in the clinches whenever it was possible. This helped him to gain victory. Later he slugged in the open and, as a pugilist, depending mainly upon his fists, beat some good wrestlers by the simple process of first knocking them out and then pinning their shoulders.

Eventually, Figg's style became known as "Figg's Fighting." Sandow was interested in what he read, but it was Mondt who supplied the inspiration.

"We'll take the best features of boxing and the holds from Graeco-Roman, combine these with the old time lumber camp style of fighting and call it "Slam Bang Western Style Wrestling," Mondt said.

Sandow and Lewis acquiesced and with the help of other matmen who saw the possibilities, the new trio of Sandow, Mondt and Lewis speeded up wrestling, changed the public taste and within a few months wrestling gates soared to new heights and the "Big Four" was brought to its knees and forced to work with the new trust.

Sandow signed wrestlers to contracts, it is said that he had as many as five hundred hulking bonecrushers under his banner at one time.

Thus was Sandow in control, not only of wrestlers, but wrestling clubs too, for without matmen, independent grappling promoters couldn't operate and via contract, Sandow had every worthwhile attraction under his thumb.

Practically overnight Billy Sandow became the coast to coast wrestling Czar, and he cracked the whip over meat tossers and promoters alike in the

style expected of royal rulers.

In the basement of his California home, Sandow built a gymnasium which he called “The Bullpen.” In the enclosure, from early morning until late in the afternoon, his behemoths tugged and hauled, working out “finishes,” testing each other’s hearts and ability, and giving the “Boss” a general line on the workers he had under contract.

When two men faced each other in the ring before an audience, each knew pretty well the other’s ability, and it must be said to Sandow’s credit that in those early days the best man usually won. Billy firmly believed that only a top notcher should be on top.

Sandow’s belief that only a wrestler of ability should be champion kept Lewis on top of wrestling’s Mount Olympus for many years. Though outlaws like Marian Plestina, Jack Sherry, John Pesek, and other tough wrestlers disputed the personable “Strangler’s” right to the heavyweight wrestling crown, Sandow rested easy of night, secure in the knowledge either Lewis or Mondt could ably cope with the rebels when forced to do so.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars poured into the Sandow, Lewis and Mondt coffers. They had struck pay dirt and were mining their lodes for all they were worth.

Chapter 6

Modus Operandi

Through the vast organization of Sandow came about a new lexicon in the world of wrestling. The word “shooting” meant a match that was on the level. In other words, a contest for blood with the best man to win.

“Working” was a term used to denote two wrestlers putting on a show for the crowd with the result determined beforehand.

A “program” was a series of bouts with the ultimate results destined to build up a suitable opponent for the champion to meet.

“Heat” meant getting the fans excited.

The organization left nothing to chance. In case a promoter not directly controlled by the trust decided later on to spill the beans, he would find himself without written evidence.

Code names and terms were used to designate wrestlers and the results of bouts. An agent sent into a town to handle a herd of wrestlers scheduled to appear in a club might receive a wire from a Sandow hooker reading:
“GLENDALE GOES THROUGH WITH LEGS STOP MITCH OVER PANAMA THIRTY MINUTES COLLISION STOP CHRIS TOPS DODGE CITY FORTY MINUTES DOCTOR PINS KANGAROO THIRTY AND TIGER UNDER TOOTS.”

Sounds confusing, doesn’t it? Well, the man in charge of the wrestlers knew its meaning. Deciphered it read: “Ray Steele wrestles draw with Fred Grubmier. Rudy Dusek beats Dick Daviscourt, by knocking his head against Daviscourt’s, both falling out of the ring. Dusek returning before the

referee can count ten. Jim Londos to beat Joe Stecher in forty minutes, Doctor Karl Sarpolis to beat Tom Alley in thirty minutes and Bill Nelson to be pinned by Toots Mondt as suits Mondt's inclination."

The reign of Sandow (the brain), Lewis (Nekoosa), and Mondt (Greeley, because he came from Greeley, Colorado), proved to be a harmonious combination for many years. The Brain was the manipulator while Nekoosa and Greeley "worked."

Billy's glib tongue induced many tough grapplers to come into the "Sandow Camp" as it was known, and work with Lewis and Mondt. By "shooting" or "working" independently, wrestlers made peanuts. Under the Sandow aegis they garnered coconuts.

Sandow saw to it that popular sectional cards made more money under his banner than they could operating independently and shooting. The wrestlers listened to reason. It was easier and more profitable to be identified with "The Gold Dust Trio."

So skilled did the Gold Dust Trio become that it kept the fans completely fooled. Lewis and Mondt, partners in the combination, mind you, frequently wrestled each other. It is said they met some fifty times, and Lewis wrestled Dick Daviscourt twenty-one times in Wichita, Kansas, alone.

The number of times Champion Lewis met good workers ran into the hundreds. The fans ate it up and came back for more. It was all a show, full of action and there being no betting on the bouts, no one suffered financially.

Master of dramaturgy was Sandow. With the skill and cunning of a Belasco, he brought out the salient and colorful points of a pachyderm's crowd appeal.

No wrestler was too unimportant for him to view in action. Money poured into the Sandow-Lewis-Mondt coffers.

Strangely enough, though Sandow, Mondt and Lewis believed in contracts, cash guarantees of faith, and bonuses as rewards for work well done, never in their long association did they have a contract between them.

Theirs was a faith and friendship that defied the efforts and whisperings of envious connivers waiting on the side lines like vultures to feed off the carnal remains when one made a slip.

When Joe Stecher went berserk it was the swashbuckling Lewis who met him in an Omaha "shooting" match and beat the Dodge City scissors king after a titanic struggle.

"The Brain" saw to it the fans were always satisfied with the bouts in which his wrestlers worked. His theatrical formula was tried and true.

In those early days, Sandow regarded wrestling as a big business, but a sacred trust. He never permitted wrestlers to bet with spectators on the outcome of their matches and refused to book matmen into any club if he suspected the promoters of permitting wagering.

He matched the rough and ready longshoremen type of grapplers with clean, skilled opponents. "Hot" matches never failed to satisfy the most critical spectator. He built matmen into local favorites, then paired the drawing card with Lewis, his champion. Sellout houses resulted.

Sandow, Lewis and Mondt perfected the formula and many of the "finishes" of wrestling matches still in use today by the Johnny Come Latelys.

There's the time limit match in which both men wrestle through to the time limit without deciding the victor. Sometimes the match is a two out of three falls contest. Perhaps each man will secure a fall with no deciding third fall. Then again the contestants will wrestle the time out without a fall.

In another finish the men bump their heads together, fall to the mat, are unable to continue and are counted out by the referee with the bout called a draw.

The variation of this finish is for one wrestler to recover consciousness in sufficient time to struggle to his feet and be declared the victor. Another variation is for both contestants to knock themselves out by falling through the ropes and onto the floor outside the ring.

Still another form is both men through the ropes with one managing to stagger weakly back into the ring before the referee completes his count.

In another finish, the aggressor is about to rush in to pin his adversary, in his eagerness misses his opponent, falling through the ring ropes to the floor outside of the ring where, apparently unconscious, he is counted out by the referee.

The now famed Jim Londos airplane spin has its variations. Sometimes the man who seems about to win has the prostrate form of his adversary across his shoulders, whirling him around for the fall. The semi-conscious opponent unbalances the man holding him, causing the latter to fall, his shoulder blades hitting the mat. The referee then pats the man on top as a sign of victory.

Sandow, Lewis and Mondt worked out dozens of “finishes.” They were great believers in the unexpected. No prosaic ending of a bout was permitted if they had their way, and for many years their word was undisputed. The Sandow, Lewis and Mondt wrestling matches had to end with a flash like the oldtime vaudeville acts. The Gold Dust Trio believed in pleasing the crowds.

It was all theatrical stuff, conceived by the wily Sandow, Lewis and Mondt. As unbelievable as it may sound to a reader, the fans ate and still eat it up, coming back for more.

At times less gullible spectators would cry “fake.” Ninety-eight percent of the time the doubters were only too correct in their deductions, but they couldn’t prove their suspicions and once afflicted with “wrestleritis,” came back again to see their favorites in action.

Joe “Toots” Mondt figured in the Sandow-Lewis combination as a policeman. To his lot fell the task of “testing” the prowess of every new matman joining the organization. He also acted as a buffer for Lewis against the radicals who cropped up from time to time to dispute Lewis’ title pretensions.

Some wrestlers even went so far as to say Mondt could beat Lewis in a “shooting” match. This was a moot question as far as “Greeley,” “The Brain,” and “Nekoosa” were concerned.

In fact, it was generally known among the “bulls,” as the matmen were termed in the game, that Lewis and Mondt frequently shot for hours in the Sandow gym without either having an advantage. But this demonstration of equal ability failed to arouse in Mondt any envy of Lewis, the champion, who received so much glory and acclaim from the populace. Mondt was content to go his way as an undercover manipulator and schemer.

At any rate, the Sandow-Lewis-Mondt triumvirate reigned supreme for many years.

Sandow was boss and wrestlers had to do his bidding or they found themselves idle, while men they felt were less competent, made hundreds weekly.

Under the Sandow-Lewis-Mondt booking system, each matman was working a program in some club, and while he might be only a preliminary wrestler in one town, yet in another he was top man.

The programs were masterpieces for stirring up racial prejudices. “The Brain” paired Germans and Frenchmen, Greeks and Russians, Chinamen

and Americans, Japs and Chinamen, Englishmen and Irish, Indians and Cowboys, westerners and easterners, and one town favorite against another.

Sandow's cards resembled representatives of nations in free for all brawls. It was this method that kept the fans coming back for more. The wrestlers worked out of central offices, handled by hookers under Sandow's direct supervision. The first of each week "workers" received their dates and instructions.

Fifty percent of the house proceeds were given by a club promoter to a Sandow representative who brought the money back to the hooker. He in turn paid each wrestler off on a Saturday for the work he had done the week currently ending.

Recompense varied according to the program a particular matman might be working at the moment, but payment was liberal. Sandow never let the "bulls" forget it paid to "work" for the great Sandow.

"The Brain" missed few opportunities to use a grappler's other talents in such a fashion as to bring money into the box office. If a wrestler had ever studied dentistry, he became the wrestling dentist. Pictures were published showing the grappler pulling teeth in spare moments. Thus came about the birth of wrestling doctors, plumbers, milkmen, plasterers, painters, violinists, tuba players, bridge players, cowboys, steer ropers, sailors, millionaire ranchers, civil engineers, interior decorators, opera singers, farmers, bearded exiled Russian priests, Hindoos, ministers, negro witch doctors, chemists, *etc.* Few had little claim to the professions and trades they professed. Nevertheless, they were billed, circused, ballyhooed, dramatized, spotlighted and placarded to such an extent, many of the subjects began to believe their own publicity.

In this, they proved to be as human as their brethren over the rest of the world, in other walks and pursuits of life.

Chapter 7

The Trust Buster

The very strength of the Sandow, Mondt and Lewis combination often proved to be its weakness. Sandow possessed conceit and a bullishness far too great for one who was literally juggling hot potatoes.

It took all the cunning and persuasion of both Lewis and Mondt to bring into line irate promoters and berserk matmen, and the time devoted to making peace in the camp often meant the loss of valuable "working" matches for both Lewis and Mondt, who had to go into rigid training and meet rebel grapplers who had tired of the Sandow dominance and were determined to break up "The Trust."

The money these bonecrushers made under the Sandow, Mondt and Lewis aegis was plentiful, but they were easy prey for connivers who instilled in them the envy of "The Gold Dust Trio," whose members possessed beautiful homes, stopped at the best hotels and received more in profits than those working for them.

Outlaw grapplers began nipping at the fringes of the Sandow herd. They became the crusaders of matdom by refusing to do business with "The Gold Dust Trio," operating in smaller clubs, unworthy from the Sandow point of view, for his wrestlers, these tough highwaymen in wrestling trunks, were self styled St. Georges, fighting the great Sandow dragon.

Lewis and Mondt were for bringing them into camp and giving them a share in the profits. Sandow had only too quickly forgotten the early days when with the help of Mondt and Lewis he had formed his great trust, founded upon the theory of one for all and all for one, with the public supplying the cash. Lewis and Mondt did the next best thing. They met

these rebels in shooting matches and subdued them, but this practice often cost the organization thousands of dollars. For the rebels, or as they termed themselves, “The Trust Busters,” often had political friends and newspaper contacts that worked against the best interests of a solidified wrestling organization. The greatest of all “The Trust Busters” throughout the years from the time of the Sandow organization at its strongest, up to the present moment have been Jack Sherry, John Pesek, Fred Grubmier, Marian Plestina, Karl Pojello, John Freeberg, William Demetral, John Evko and Hans Steinke.

Through the years, as the wrestling picture changed hands, they worried and harassed the various grappling manipulators, often costing the groups thousands of dollars which could have been easily picked up from the public if the revolters had only listened to reason.

As the crusaders of matdom, they managed to live on crumbs from the wrestling cake which the great mat manipulators were too busy to pick up while the bigger houses and larger gates were in the offing.

Only the great wrestling abilities of Mondt and Lewis prevented the vast Sandow organization from crumbling before the onslaughts of these mighty “shooters.”

A wrestler named William Demetral is a case in point.

Demetral had been going his merry way with the Sandow organization and making considerable money. Connivers began buzzing to him about the huge sums of money “The Gold Dust Trio” was making from matches in which Demetral engaged. Demetral began laying plans to trap Lewis into a title match with a fixed referee, or, that failing, he schemed to break the trust wide open and conduct a mad scramble for title honors. He selected Illinois for his battlefield and Sandow fell into the trap set for Lewis.

Demetral obtained from Sandow a five thousand dollar loan on his Chicago home and gave in return a mortgage to his boss. Then he met and lost in a bout to Lewis in Chicago. The fireworks began.

Demetral went to Walter Eckersal, Chicago Tribune sports editor and declared he could have thrown Lewis if the fear of foreclosure hadn't hung over his head. The Tribune printed Demetral's charges of a trust. Demetral kept talking, revealing the inside of many big title bouts held in the Windy City and what he didn't know to be a fact, he supplied from his fertile imagination.

His charges broke the mat game wide open in Illinois and the stories, filed through the Chicago Tribune news syndicate, almost wrecked the mat game throughout the United States. Dark days loomed for the "Gold Dust Trio."

The governor of Illinois ordered an investigation. He threatened to ban wrestling from the Prairie State and declare Lewis' title forfeited in his domain if evidence warranted.

Sandow was frantic. He scurried about Illinois, contacting politicians and influential persons in an effort to hush the probe. The governor was adamant. Though Sandow spent money lavishly, his nibs was determined to see the probe through.

Sandow began biting his nails and wondering what course to take. It was Lewis who came to the rescue. Sandow, Lewis, Mondt, Demetral, and White were ordered by the governor to appear in Springfield, Illinois, before a special legislative committee.

Demetral's testimony was heard, then Lewis was sworn to testify.

Presenting a release on the mortgage which Sandow had held, Lewis said to the committee: "I'm mat champion of the world. I stand ready to meet any man alive for my title. I have never asked a man to lose to me and I never will. Demetral believes he could have beaten me if he hadn't borrowed money from Sandow. I present herewith a release from Sandow. I also lay before you gentlemen a cash bond of twenty-five thousand dollars and I am willing to pay it to Demetral if he can beat me here before you

gentlemen in this room or in any gymnasium you care to name." Demetral declined the challenge and there the investigation ended. The "best man for champion" had again been effectively demonstrated.

Often Sandow paid a high price to "Trust Busters" to keep them out of his territory and to harass growing competitors.

Probably the greatest cancer ever to annoy the Sandow organization was Marian Plestina, a rugged individual who was sponsored by Joe Marsh. Plestina was the pawn Marsh used to keep Sandow awake nights.

Strangely enough, though Sandow knew the ability of both Lewis and Mondt, he hesitated to put them to the test too often and, therefore, these crusaders had an easier time of it in their peregrinations about North America.

Bernarr MacFadden, Publisher of Physical Culture Magazine, and Jack Curley of New York, proved to be the aids both Marsh and Plestina needed. MacFadden was a great believer in physical well-being and espoused the cause of Plestina. Jack Curley wanted to share in the immense profits of the Sandow combination and, therefore, used his influence and friendship with New York newspapers in an effort to discredit Lewis as World's Heavyweight Wrestling Champion.

Marsh placarded the country from coast to coast with broadsides proclaiming the crooked and double dealings of Sandow, Lewis and Mondt. Though the three had never so much as taken a penny unlawfully from any man, Marsh began to make his allegations felt in many quarters. Some of the best towns fell off in wrestling gates. Lewis and Mondt again wanted to prove championship superiority on the mat, but Sandow lacked the confidence necessary to test his own partners' prowess.

"You can't tell," Sandow would reply to Lewis' and Mondt's importunings. "Marsh and Plestina may have the referee fixed or maybe Plestina can really beat both you and Lewis."

The situation became serious. Sandow proved incapable of coping with the emergency. Stories were printed in friendly newspapers that Marsh had served a term in prison. This didn't faze Plestina's mentor one whit.

Instead of denying the stories, Marsh, consummate showman, made capital of the charges and posed as a reformed rogue. With his tongue in his cheek, Marsh told spellbound yokels:

"That is public knowledge. Of course, I made mistakes when I was a kid and I paid my debt to society. Now I want to go straight and repay the public for my sins, so I'm out to break the mat trust."

Again Lewis and Mondt came to the rescue and solved the Plestina-Marsh problem.

Though the two trust busters were receiving considerable publicity, they lacked money. Mondt ran into Marsh one night in the Hotel Pfeister in Milwaukee. He invited Marsh and Plestina to his room for a drink and while the liquor flowed freely, made the following proposition:

"I think, Marian," he said to Plestina, "that without question you're one of the world's greatest wrestlers. It's a shame Sandow won't let you come into the organization and be champion. Now I know you can beat Lewis and I think I can handle Ed, so I tell you what you do. Tomorrow we'll drive together up to Lewis' summer home in Nekoosa, Wisconsin. Ed is there with Scotty MacDougall and a few training partners. The first day you wrestle with MacDougall and some of the other boys. Then rest a few days and you can go to the mat with Lewis. You two boys will shoot, and if Lewis beats you fairly and squarely with Marsh as the referee, we'll take you into the combination and work several matches with you and get some real money. If you beat Lewis we'll sign a contract to let you wrestle Lewis in New York, Chicago, or anywhere else where we can draw money, and we'll guarantee to dump the heavyweight mat title to you. If you beat Lewis fairly and squarely at the camp I'll give you my word you'll get a chance within two months to win the title in public from Lewis. But if you fail, then you and Marsh must come into the organization and play ball."

Plestina and Marsh mulled the proposition over. Finally Plestina said: "I'll do it. Now I'm a hero, the uncrowned champion, but I have a wife and kids home who are almost starving, and they can't eat my newspaper write ups. I'm tired anyway of being an outlaw, so I'll go up to the camp with you and show you what I've got. I know I can beat Lewis and I can't get a match with him unless I play ball your way, so I might just as well try your scheme out. Anyway, even if I lose I can make money with your crowd, and I'm not making much now." Spectators who attended the arrival of Mondt, Plestina and Marsh into Lewis' summer camp at Nekoosa, Wisconsin, say Sandow's hair turned so gray it necessitated another application of dye before Billy's always youthful appearance was restored. Ed White, Joe Coffey, Sandow and one or two others had their doubts as to the benefits of the plan. "If he beats Lewis," protested Sandow, "how do we know he won't spill the beans and advertise the fact to the world and ruin us that much more?"

"If he beats me," replied the Strangler, "he deserves to be champion and I'm willing to let him have it. I'm sick and tired of being baited with this fellow and we're going to the mat not in two or three days, but right now."

Lewis threw Plestina two falls in thirty minutes and another trust buster was brought to his knees.

In the years that followed, Lewis and Plestina wrestled in almost every big city in America, before gates totaling thousands of dollars.

Marsh became a promoter in the Northwest and Plestina became a "good boy." Either Sandow began to fear his own partners' abilities or he possessed too much envy to give credit where it was due, for three days later while all concerned were discussing the Plestina-Lewis contest, Sandow cut the conversation short with: "Yes, Ed did a great job. But do you fellows really believe Plestina was trying?" Sandow was never satisfied and his comment on the Lewis-Plestina shooting match at Lewis' summer camp was one of the first of his many remarks that eventually led to the split up of the greatest and most successful wrestling combination in the history of American sportsdom.

Chapter 8

Swindling the Swindlers

The trust busters traveled their merry way throughout America "swindling the swindlers" of matdom.

Jack Sherry, a half breed Croatian and Alaskan Indian was another of the trust busters who enjoyed a short moment of glory in baiting the combination. Then Mondt, acting as Lewis' buffer, took Sherry on in a "shooting" match and subdued him.

John Evko also fell before Mondt and Lewis.

Probably the most overrated of all the trust busters was Hans Steinke of Germany, whom Jack Curley of New York advanced as an opponent for Lewis. Steinke refused to meet Lewis outside of New York City and inasmuch as Curley had, at the time, sufficient influence to sway the State Athletic Commission enough to compel Lewis to meet Steinke under his promotion, Sandow shunned New York City and Steinke received official recognition as champion.

"It didn't matter that Lewis wasn't recognized in New York State," says Sandow. "We made thousands of dollars outside of New York and couldn't fill our dates. So we let Steinke have the title and starve with it."

The fact remains, however, that Sandow's refusal to concur with the opinions of Lewis and Mondt that they should go into New York and clear up the Steinke title claims, led to a later day breach which was to give Mondt the upper hand in wrestling throughout the United States and relegate Sandow to the highways and byways of rural America.

Perhaps it was because Sandow was well aware of the many programs he staged that he feared to test the prowess of his stalwarts too much, but this very temerity oftentimes led to Billy trusting persons whom Mondt and Lewis both knew were awaiting the chance to double-cross either of them.

Wladek Zbyszko, brother of the famed and capable, albeit ancient, Stanislaus Zbyszko, tried to "hook" (as the wrestlers term a double cross) Lewis during a program bout in Rochester, New York, back in the early twenties. Half blinded from trachoma, most dreaded of all mat diseases, Lewis sensed Wladek's object and took all fight out of his opponent by breaking his arm.

Sandow's whip-cracking, and growing insufferable ego, made it easier for trust busters to get their work in.

Ed White of Chicago played upon Sandow's lack of confidence by turning up one day with a "Masked Marvel" and challenging the entire wrestling world with him. White's masked wonder received columns of publicity and Sandow quaked in his shoes. Lewis and Mondt champed at the bit in their anxiety to go to the post with White's wonder man.

"Listen to me," Lewis begged of Sandow. "That fellow's getting a lot of publicity, especially in Chicago. Now if you let me shoot with him we might draw a hundred thousand dollars, and that's important money. We can make a deal with White and if the fellow beats me leveling up and shooting the works, then his champion can work with us and we'll make a lot of money.

The game needs a new face. It's getting tired of me." "Nope," ruled Sandow. "You stay champion until I get a better man to take your place." It wasn't long thereafter when White matched his boy with a preliminary lad for a bout in an out of the way Illinois wrestling club, and his "Masked Marvel" was not only unmasked, but found to be John Freeberg, a run of the mine grappler, whom Lewis had thrown many times in Sandow's basement gymnasium.

Again a bluffer had been able to hold Sandow at bay.

Lewis had won his title from Joe Stecher in 1920. Mat experts who witnessed the contest have called it the greatest display of skill and science ever viewed, between two well conditioned athletes. Lewis dumped the crown to Stanislaus Zbyszko in 1921, but regained it the following year when he defeated the elder Zbyszko.

The Pole had proved to be a colorless champion so, on March 22, 1922, Lewis took back the title, before a capacity house. The bout drew nearly seventeen thousand dollars. Tom Law was the promoter.

It had been the belief of Mondt, Sandow and Lewis that a Polish champion would bring out the Pole following, but when their judgment proved to be wrong, Sandow, Lewis and Mondt took the crown back. It was at this point that the Sandow-Lewis-Mondt combine began its greatest promotional work and wrestling was placed upon the profitable basis which lured the trust busters.

The most colorful and greatest of all the trust busters was a gawky farmer lad named Fred Grubmier. In the years he tormented the champions and near wrestling greats, “Grubby,” as he was known, traveled the length and breadth of America shooting at other trust busters as well as Lewis and Stecher. Many a narrow squeeze had the so-called tough guys of matdom when they were trapped on the mat with Fred.

Grubby it was who “rung in” on Jack Sherry when the latter was busting the Sandow trust throughout Minnesota. Sherry was traveling with a carnival and had a thousand dollar cash bond up to meet all comers. The troupe reached St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Grubmier appeared upon the scene, accepted Sherry’s challenge, posted a like amount and proceeded to bust the trust buster by dumping him to the canvas two falls inside of one hour. Sherry left the carnival just ahead of the irate midway operator’s shotgun.

During those early twenties this writer often ran across the hand of Grubmier in many a bonecrushing contest. His very appearance would lead the unwary into traps, from which they found difficulty in extricating themselves.

Perhaps Grubmier sprang upon some unsuspecting trust buster like Plestina, Pesek, Pojello, Freeberg, or Evko, while they were touring with a carnival or circus, offering to wager thousands no man could beat them. The racket was that those challengers from the audience were part and parcel of the program and the trust busters had little trouble subduing their opponents at the right moment. The challenge money was usually posted with some responsible town official just to make the dodge look on the level and this fact gave Grubmier his advantage.

The Grubmier modus operandi ran true to form. This chronicler witnessed many of them. The joust always began in the same way.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are offering two thousand dollars to any man in the audience who can stay with the uncrowned champion for ten minutes. Furthermore, folks, we are willing to make a side bet with anyone who thinks the “champion” cannot throw him inside of twenty minutes. Don’t be bashful, men, step right up and lock grips with the champ. There’s two thousand dollars awaiting you if you turn the trick.”

It was the usual carnival spiel, or then again it might be the manager of some new wrestling threat touring the byways with his “trust buster,” and offering to take on all comers. Not forgetting, of course, a few bonecrushing hirelings planted in the audience who responded at the proper moment and after some semi-serious clowning, would be thrown by the alleged master of them all.

At times the offer to meet all comers proved to be an expensive proposition. Onto the stage would amble an angular rustic, clothed in dirty overalls, wearing manure-caked boots, a battered felt hat and a tattered mackinaw coat with a cheap, half-smoked stogie dangling in his mouth.

With his appearance the audience would guffaw, for the yokels remembered him as the half-wit farmer who had been hanging around town betting the boys in the poolroom he could beat them at foot racing, cards, billiards, pool, weight lifting or hay pitching, and always he lost.

No wonder they laughed.

Even the manager and his "champion" couldn't hide their smiles. Sometimes a small carnival band would be in the pit and the always alert orchestra leader would clown to beat all by having his boys play "Hearts and Flowers." Truly, a sorrier sight than Grubmier had seldom been seen on a wrestling mat.

After a brief conversation with the scarecrow who posed as a man, the wrestling manager would hold up his hand for silence and then announce:

"We have a courageous opponent here for the champion. His name is Fred Grubmier. He is six feet three inches tall, weighs two hundred pounds exactly, and wants to meet my man." Then turning toward Grubmier, the manager would inquire facetiously: "Don't you want to make a side bet with the champion just to make the contest more interesting?"

It was the old carnival racket of taking any unsuspecting yokel into camp who might have a little cash and thought he could wrestle.

"Wai," the candidate for the slaughter would drawl in reply, "I ain't much of a hand at bettin', but I sold some stock recently and me an' a friend in the audience have about four thousand dollars in cash between us and maybe I'll take a flier. I think I'm pretty good and can beat your man."

More laughs from the spectators. They were recalling the yokel's absurd bets around the pool rooms. They knew he couldn't wrestle his way out of a paper bag. They were as interested in covering all the Grubmier bets as the "champion" and his manager were.

The manager, of course, couldn't believe his ears. To find a sucker in this out of the way place was almost too good to be true. After a little bargaining he would accept the proposition and a side bet of say, two thousand dollars, in addition to the originally offered carnival purse for staying with the champion, which would be posted with the local constable.

Then the rough clad yokel would strip down for action and the crowd would get another laugh. For this Ichabod Crane-like granger disdained the usual wrestler's paraphernalia, preferring his long red flannel underwear and bare feet when he went to the mat. Usually Grubmier had persuaded the manager to appoint the constable or some other town notable to referee, just to make matters straight. In most cases the confident pilot would give his consent.

The signal would be given and both men would lock grips. The "trust buster" would apply a few holds to his plowman opponent just to test him out. To his consternation he would find they were broken easily. More punishing holds would be locked onto his emaciated scarecrow adversary, only to have them again broken with ease.

Then would it dawn upon the onlooking manager and his luckless matman protege that the rube opponent was a wolf in sheep's clothing. The "trust buster" would work feverishly but without success to pin the ringer as quickly as possible, and save the bets and bonus money. The alleged tiller of the soil would fight off his adversary successfully.

Suddenly both would go to the canvas. The "ringer's" legs would lash out like a serpent's tongue preparing to strike. Desperately the "trust buster" would scramble frantically to avoid them. With deadly sinuousness Grubmier's legs would girdle his opponent's midriff and the amazed "champion," manager, and audience, would witness the amazing and almost unbelievable sight of a strong, weighty man picked up bodily and twirled from side to side with confusing and dizzy rapidity.

The "trust buster's" arms would flap helplessly while the python-like limbs of his adversary squeezed his midriff tighter. The shock of being

tossed hither and thither in the labyrinth of Grubmier's legs finally befogged the opponent's brain. He was being kayoed without benefit of a punch to the jaw.

Grubmier's hawk like eyes watched his opponent's contortions. At the proper moment Grubby would shift to a punishing frog scissors, a hold of his own invention, and slowly the "trust buster's" shoulders would be pressed to the mat.

There would be charges of frame-up, etc., on the part of all the luckless concerned, but when the smoke of battle had cleared away, Grubmier and his friend would collect their bets and the special forfeit money, climb into a wheezy old model T Ford and move on to another town where they knew a carnival with another "champion" was shortly scheduled to play.

Sometimes Grubmier rung in on wrestlers dressed as a farmer. Then again he might be a lumberjack just in from the camps with his winter's earnings. In mining towns he was a sourdough who had struck it rich.

He employed a multiple of disguises and caught the unwary off guard. Lewis and Mondt, touring with Miller Bros. Wild West Show just managed to stave off defeat at the hands of this Iowa country bumpkin.

The adventurous pretender became the scourge of the Sandow-Mondt-Lewis combine and all the so-called "trust busters." He broke carnivals and took the wrestling crooks into camp with his innocent and sucker-like appearance.

Fred Grubmier came out of Harlan, Iowa, in the early twenties, and in company with a wealthy neighboring farmer, named Pete Fromm, who raced harness horses, he toured the country as a ringer.

"I got the idea one time when Plestina came to our town to wrestle and take on all comers," explained Grubmier.

“I used to wrestle around the farm and with the boys in the village. I developed my combination hook and frog scissors hold by exercising my legs with buggy and freight car springs. Plestina and Joe Marsh came into Harlan and had in tow a big backer with a lot of money. They offered to take on all comers and Plestina threw a lot of fellows in the village.

“Fromm, who owned the neighboring farm to my folks, thought of trying me out with Plestina and bet two thousand dollars on me. I hooked Plestina and we decided to go to another town where another carnival was playing with Karl Pojello taking on all comers. We cleaned up again, so we started reading the Billboard Theater Magazine and watching the carnival routes.

“In one season we made about fifteen thousand dollars. This is better than horse racing. A fellow has to spend a lot of money on fancy feed, transportation and care of horses, and with a wrestler you only have to spend a ‘ few dollars a day to keep him alive.’ So, from then on we went around hooking the wise guys.”

A farm angel and a mat devil!

Fred Grubmier!

The fellow who busted the trust busters!

Chapter 9

Higher Education

The mat picture changed from time to time, with promoters in various cities shifting their scene of activities, but the triumvirate of Sandow, Lewis and Mondt reigned supreme and “The Brain” cracked his whip in the manner expected of a wrestling Czar.

Various independent combinations cropped up here and there, but the solidity of the “Big Trust” prevented them from getting too far with their operations. The title was the all-important thing and Lewis held the valued diadem securely on his head.

Jack Curley of New York, in company with the Stecher brothers, and the Zbyszko brothers, worked feverishly to break the combine, but their efforts proved fruitless in all but a few isolated spots. It was Sandow himself, who supplied many a hectic day for his two partners, Lewis and Mondt.

In 1924 Sandow attended a University of Nebraska football game and witnessed the fine gridiron work of Wayne “Big” Munn. Sandow returned to a conference with his partners full of enthusiasm.

“If we could get this fellow Munn to turn to wrestling, he’d be a sensation. He could be built up until he was ready for a shot and then throw Lewis,” Sandow told them.

“Can he wrestle?” asked both Lewis and Mondt.

“What if he can’t?” replied Billy. “He’ll bring the college element into the game and we’ll make a lot of dough. That’s what the sport needs, new blood.”

“Suppose someone hooks him after he’s champion?” asked Lewis.

“No one will hook him because we won’t let him work with anyone unless we know the fellow’s okeh,” responded The Brain, “and besides,” he continued, “both you fellows can protect him and if we think there’s any danger we can put in our own referee.”

Considerable discussion followed thereafter, but Sandow finally had his way. Munn was induced to turn wrestler, and in Gabe Kaufmann’s club in Kansas City on January 8, 1925, Wayne “Big” Munn became World’s Heavyweight Wrestling Champion, when he won the title on default from Ed Lewis, when the latter was unable to continue his match after being thrown from the ring and into the audience.

Lewis was taken to a Kansas City Hospital, in a supposedly serious condition, and Munn was heralded from one end of America to the other as the new champion.

There were some doubting Thomases, however, and Floyd Fitzsimmons of Benton Harbor, Mich., dickered with Sandow and closed for Lewis and Munn to wrestle again on Decoration Day, May 30, 1925. The ballyhoo drums began to beat on the return bout for the title. A two hundred thousand dollar gate was predicted.

A bombshell burst around the “Gold Dust Trio’s” heads before the scheduled return match could take place. Sandow’s greed provided the fuse to light off the explosion.

Munn received an offer and Sandow accepted it, for the new champion to wrestle ancient Stanislaus Zbyszko in Philadelphia on April 15, 1925. Lewis and Mondt wanted the bout passed up. They feared a double cross Sandow reassured them.

“There’s nothing to fear from old man Zbyszko any more,” he told them. “He and Wladek had some trouble with the Stecher boys and Jack

Curley, and are no longer working with them. I've got both brothers tied up so there can't be anything wrong. It's a chance to pick up some easy money and I'll be there to see that everything is all right."

The bout went through as scheduled and Stanislaus Zbyszko threw Wayne Munn flat on his back, not once but so many times that the referee, who was friendly to the Sandow interests, was compelled to call the turn correctly, and proclaim Zbyszko the winner and new champion.

Old Stanislaus won the first fall in eight minutes and the second in four minutes, a total of twelve minutes in all. The reader can get a quick glimpse of matters wrestling and secure a line on the future happenings when it is pointed out that just a few years later, Zbyszko, the mighty, who tumbled Munn off his throne, after the latter had beaten Lewis, visited Paddulo, India, on January 31, 1928, where, before a huge crowd, he was defeated in four seconds by the Great Gama. Gotch had done it in six seconds, it took Gama four seconds and yet a man apparently not a first flight grappler, if we can judge by the Gotch and Gama defeats, was able to throw World's Champion Munn, two straight falls inside of twelve minutes. The Zbyszko victory over Munn was one of the epochal double crossings of matdom.

Warren Brown, sports editor of the Chicago Herald and Examiner, phoned the sad news of Munn's defeat to Mondt, who was in Louisville where he had wrestled for the edification of the turf devotees.

"Toots" was in his hotel room preparing to depart for Chicago when he received the message.

"Joe," said Brown, "did you know that Munn lost his title tonight in Philadelphia?" "Speak a little more clearly, Warren, I can't hear you," replied Toots, "I misunderstood you. It sounded like you said Munn lost. You mean Zbyszko lost, don't you?" "Nope," replied Brown, "I mean Munn lost."

Mondt fainted dead away and Brown vows to this day that he heard Toots' body crash to the floor, over the wire.

Old Stanislaus quickly showed his hand, however. It took him only a matter of weeks (Decoration Day, 1925) to meet and suffer defeat at the hands of Joe Stecher in St. Louis. The Stecher-Zbyszko bout drew fifty thousand dollars.

The defeat of Munn left the Sandow-Lewis-Mondt combination in a bad way. Interest in the Benton Harbor match began to wane and it was apparent there wouldn't be much of a house to witness the bout, since Munn had lost his laurels. Political pressure was brought to bear and some of the Illinois and Michigan officials were persuaded to reverse the verdict of the Philadelphia match, but the damage had been done and the Benton Harbor bout, which Lewis won, drew sixty thousand dollars, about one-fourth the gate expected when the match had been made.

The work of restoring Lewis' prestige became an arduous one. "The Gold Dust Trio" was fighting for its wrestling life. While Lewis continued to draw fairly large houses, many of the Sandow wrestlers deserted his standard to work with Stecher, the new champion.

Stecher virtually put the title in moth balls. He was surrounded by the Mondt-Sandow-Lewis combination and feared defeat from every quarter. Lewis managed to get Stecher into the ring with him on July 5, 1926, in Omaha, but at the end of five hours of tugging and hauling, with spectators throwing papers, chairs and bottles into the ring, the bout was called a draw.

The decision was as wormwood to Lewis, who, with Referee Ed Smith as impartial third man, had felt certain he would humble the tenacious Joe.

Lewis entered the ring half blinded from trachoma, that dread ravaging eye disease which Yussif Mahmout, the original "Terrible Turk" first brought to this country.

Despite his handicap, Lewis was able to parry Stecher and keep him at a sufficient distance to at least prevent the scissors king from winning.

Mondt, the Rasputin of the mat moguls, began laying his traps for the wily Stecher brothers. He almost snared the Champion in Boston, on April 3, 1926. One Jake Bressler of Iowa was being built up in Paul Bowser's club as the "Mysterious Unknown." No name or other identifying marks, just "The Mysterious Unknown." It was an old ruse often used in the past with masked marvels, red devils and blue menaces. Jake Bressler, the redoubtable Joe Stecher was willing to meet, but imagine his consternation when on the night of the bout in question, another "Unknown" had been substituted in the person of tough, rough, skilled and capable Joe Malcewicz, the Utica, New York, "Panther," who had, in the gymnasium only, of course, taken the measure of many a wrestling foeman.

The Stecher brothers refused to go through with the match, and there the matter ended. Strangely enough, the credulous mat fan didn't seem to think this at all out of the way. Scissors Joe could go along, night after night meeting such "tough" nuts as the Zbyszko brothers, Ivan Poddubny, Dick Daviscourt, and Jim Londos, but balked when another worthy foeman was substituted.

Here was Tony Stecher's statement regarding the Boston attempt to "hook" brother Joe and his heavyweight mat championship.

"As we were guaranteed $12,500 for the Boston bout and $10,000 for the Philadelphia match, I agreed, and we came east. In Boston we would meet a wrestler called "The Unknown," but in reality Jake Bressler, whom Joe figured to beat quite easily. In Philadelphia, Joe was matched with Wladek Zbyszko. The promoter in Boston kept stalling on the payment of guarantee, and finally promised he would give brother Joe his guarantee after the bout. As the referee and terms were satisfactory, we entered the ring, expecting to make a quick bout of it, with Joe throwing Jake inside half an hour.

"When we entered the ring, Bressler was sitting by the ringside, but just as soon as we got in our corner he disappeared, as did the promoter and all the rest connected with the club. Into the ring came Joe Malcewicz of Utica,

New York, who, stripping down to ring togs from street clothes, made ready to wrestle my brother.

"Then a different referee from the man whom we had agreed upon entered the ring and told us to get started with our wrestling. I realized it was all a plant and refused to go on with the bout. The referee wasn't the man we agreed upon and neither was Malcewicz the opponent. I ordered my brother out of the ring, a riot started, and we went to the dressing room, where, after packing our bags, we headed for Philadelphia.

"I was on to the scheme. The plan was to get the referee either to disqualify Joe Stecher for some supposed foul, or see that Malcewicz, through some means within the power of the referee, was declared the winner and new champion. With that referee we wouldn't have had a chance to win."

For the record let it be said that Referee Leon Burbank declared Malcewicz champion by default, and Stecher no longer champion. Fans, however, generally ignored the Malcewicz claims, and Stecher continued to be recognized as titleholder.

Malcewicz, however, had figured before in other bouts of the Stecher-Malcewicz nature. Just after Earl Caddock returned from overseas with the A.E.F., Joe met Earl in a non-title bout in Utica, in which Caddock was to toss Malcewicz within an hour. The referee double-crossed Caddock, and Malcewicz stayed the limit, with the arbiter declaring Malcewicz victor and new champion. The recognition never did stick, however, and when Stecher and Caddock met in New York, it was generally recognized for the title.

The Gold Dust Trio continued operation after the Stecher-Malcewicz incident in Boston. "Strangler" Lewis continued to bill himself as World's Champion, though his claims were not generally recognized. It was merely a grasping at straws to preserve the "Strangler's" box office appeal until he could again get Stecher into the ring with him.

Lewis possessed a glib tongue and denounced Stecher for a coward because of his refusal to meet him in a return bout. Even the phlegmatic Joe finally got riled and agreed to meet Lewis in St. Louis, on February 20, 1928. The bout went two and a half hours and was a nip and tuck affair. Lewis won the first fall shortly after the two-hour mark was reached, lost the second fall in one minute, and won the third and deciding fall in thirteen minutes.

Wrestlers and promoters from all over the United States were on hand to witness the Stecher-Lewis championship duel. With a neutral referee, one agreed upon by both contestants, it promised to be one of those seldom witnessed bouts, "a shooting match." The St. Louis Coliseum was jammed to the rafters. Lewis was led by the hand into the ring by Sandow. If the Stecher camp had been aware of Lewis' eye condition, there might have been a different story told, but Mondt and Sandow had kept Lewis' trachoma carefully hidden. For, while Lewis was in splendid physical condition, he could barely see the outline of figures before his face. For weeks the ravages of the dread Oriental scourge had compelled Lewis to wear black glasses and remain in darkened rooms. This, then, was the man who humbled the mighty Stecher.

Shortly after Lewis and Stecher had leveled for two hours, the spectators noticed Lewis and his adversary were talking. The conversation continued only briefly, and Lewis then pinned Joe. The rest of the bout followed as recounted.

After the bout's conclusion, Jim Londos and Renato Gardini, with smirks on their faces came into Lewis' dressing room.

"And we thought we were going to see a shooting match," sneered Londos.

"Well," answered Mondt, "you fellows wouldn't know a shooting match when you saw one. You never were in any."

Suffice to say at this time that despite protection and "program" bouts, probably no greater wrestlers, in the opinions of experts, existed in modern grappling than Stecher, Lewis, Mondt and Dean Detton. Whether they could beat the great Hindu Punjab matmen, is another question, but certainly for sheer courage they outrank Gotch in greatness.

In the St. Louis bout, Joe's scissors broke two of Lewis' ribs, and though half blind, Lewis possessed enough courage to hold out longer than his Dodge City rival.

An aftermath conversation cites better than anything else the courage possessed by Lewis. In the dressing room after the bout, Stecher congratulated Lewis, saying: "Ed, you're a better man. I held out as long as I could. I thought you were going many times while we were in there, but you fooled me and I finally got discouraged and gave up." "I'm glad you did, Joe," responded Lewis, "because I could hardly see you toward the end and I was ready to quit just when you did." Joe shook his head sadly.

"I guess, Ed," he concluded, "you have too much patience for me." Toots Mondt interrupted, "Do you mean patience," he asked, "or just plain guts?"

Chapter 10

Rift in the Lute

After Lewis' defeat of Stecher it seemed that nothing would halt the Gold Dust Trio's onward march to further riches. Sandow was still planning a new champion, and while Lewis wanted to rid himself of the tiresome honors just as much as his partner was anxious to have him do so, yet both Ed and "Toots" insisted upon a champion on top who could wrestle. Came 1928, and a rift between Sandow and Mondt gave the enterprising Billy the opportunity he sought.

Max Bauman, Billy's brother, had long been agitating against the power and scope of Mondt. The latter sensed the affair would shortly come to a point where either he or Baumann would have to leave the organization. Toots went to Billy and demanded a showdown. Sandow refused to curb his brother and invited Mondt to leave the combination.

Toots accepted the invitation. Lewis strung along with Sandow, and from that point onward Sandow's star began to set.

The activities of Mondt and his part in the wrestling picture will be covered in another chapter. Let's go on with Sandow.

The year of 1929 brings us up to "Dynamite" Gus Sonnenberg, former Dartmouth football star, who had been brought into wrestling by Bill Cunningham, sports writer of the Boston Post. Sonnenberg was a great favorite around Boston and was packing them in through the turnstiles for Paul Bowser, Bean City promoter.

Sandow and Bowser decided that Sonnenberg would be a great attraction if he had the wrestling crown to add to his color. So on January 4,

1929, Lewis and Sonnenberg met in a title bout in Boston and “Dynamite Gus” won the crown.

It has been said that Bowser posted seventy thousand dollars with “Nekoosa” and “The Brain” as a guarantee that Lewis would regain his mat title when Sonnenberg had outlived his box office attraction.

Sonnenberg proved the transfusion needed to restore life blood in the fading wrestling pulse. As champion, he brought the college element to professional wrestling matches, and a better class of people generally became interested in the sport.

Wrestling gates, with Gus Sonnenberg as the star attraction, zoomed to dizzy and undreamed of heights. Lewis and Sandow being the men behind the Sonnenberg throne, saw to it that “Dynamite Gus” was sufficiently protected. Sonny and Lewis met again on July 10, 1929, and sold out Boston’s Fenway Park.

Wherever a wrestler ran berserk and challenged Sonnenberg’s ability, Lewis was thrown into the breach and the rebel was promptly and efficiently subdued.

It was “Dynamite Gus” who brought the flying tackle into prominence and inspired so many college football stars to turn to the mat for a livelihood.

While Sonnenberg didn’t last long as champion, his name goes down in history as the man who put bone crushing in the collegian class. In his heyday he drew bigger average houses than any other matman up to that time.

Sandow, Lewis and Bowser, were, of course, pleased. Mondt, who had gone south to work with Rudy Dusek, a small time mat manipulator, sought revenge.

Sonnenberg wrestled the same opponents as many as twenty-five times. Dan Koloff, a wrestler, and Sonnenberg's chief "policeman," met and was defeated by the champion as many as fifty times.

The use of different names for the same opponents and the fact that the big wire services, such as the United Press, Associated Press, International News Service and Universal Service, cared so little about wrestling matches that they failed to report the results to member papers throughout America, also helped Sandow, Bowser and Lewis to put over their title holder.

The shekels rolled into the coffers of Lewis, Bowser and Sandow. All was serene on the horizon until a Greek wrestler named Jim Londos and a German strongman named Richard Shikat appeared on the scene.

Shikat had won recognition in Pennsylvania as World's Heavyweight Wrestling Champion, by virtue of a victory over Jim Londos. Both men were partners in a clique composed of Joe "Toots" Mondt, Ray Fabiani, Jack Curley, Ed White, Rudy Miller, Jack Pfeffer and Tom Packs.

Sonnenberg was making too much money to satisfy the "outlaws." Shikat, Londos, Rudy Dusek, Ray Steele and Hans Steinke, instigated by Mondt, began parading the country baiting Sonnenberg, wherever possible, and hurling challenges.

Mondt's annoyance campaign of Sonnenberg even went to the extreme of advertising another Gus Sonnenberg, through the territory where there were no State Athletic Commissions to stop him, and having the synthetic Sonnenberg thrown every night in the week. Marshall Blackstock was the pseudo Sonnenberg who took considerable wind out of the real champion's sails.

Just how great a wrestler was Gus Sonnenberg, you might gather from a little incident that occurred in Los Angeles while "Dynamite Gus" held the wrestling title. Pete Lajimmi, a second rate welterweight wrestler, who had a fancied grievance against Lewis, Sandow and Bowser, ran into Gus on the street one afternoon and beat the luckless champion into insensibility.

Sandow forgot himself sufficiently to have Lajimmi arrested, and the public was treated to the spectacle of a heavyweight wrestling champion, weighing two hundred and twenty pounds seeking redress from the police for a beating received at the hands of a one hundred and forty pound opponent. This incident, while it served to tarnish Sonnenberg's reputation only a trifle, nevertheless, gave the public an idea of the man's wrestling ability.

The hand of the sly "Toots" Mondt was working well.

Lewis and Sandow seemed unable to stem the adverse tide. Then, on December 10, 1930, out of a clear sky, without consulting Lewis or Sandow, Bowser switched the heavyweight wrestling title to Ed Don George, former Olympic champion. This move angered Lewis and Sandow, but they awaited an opportunity to even matters.

It came the next year in Los Angeles. Bowser, believing he had placated Lewis and Sandow, matched Lewis with George for the heavyweight title. The pair met April 14, 1931, drew one of the biggest gates in the history of wrestling, and one of the greatest upsets in matdom occurred when Lewis threw George to regain the title.

Bowser, needless to say, was enraged, but had to make the best of an unfortunate occurrence. He bided his time and began laying plans to get the title away from Lewis. With the skilled "Strangler" once again in possession of the mat crown, Londos, Shikat and their cohorts quieted down.

Wrestling gossip says Sandow and Lewis held Bowser's $70,000 forfeit, which the Bostonian had posted when the title originally went to Sonnenberg.

Two weeks after the double cross of George in Los Angeles, Bowser met Sandow in Chicago and after a lengthy conference, persuaded Sandow to return fifty thousand dollars of the seventy thousand dollar forfeit money.

“I figure fifty thousand dollars is all you deserve,” said Sandow, his old time confidence and ego restored. “Now we’ll work with you, Paul, and give you a break, but don’t try any of your funny stuff again.”

Bowser promised to be good.

Though Jim Londos had been established in Pennsylvania and New York state as champion, Lewis and Sandow regained some of their old time prestige with the return of the title from Ed Don George, but the fires of resentment burned deeply within Bowser’s Dutch breast.

His opportunity to get even came in Montreal, Canada, in 1931, the same year Lewis had double crossed and defeated George.

Lewis was booked there to lock grips with the Frenchman, Henri De Glane, just a fair opponent. Dan Koloff, one of Bowser’s many henchmen, was sent to Montreal for the alleged purpose of managing De Glane, and aiding Sandow in the ballyhoo for the match.

De Glane won the first fall, Lewis the second. Both wrestlers went to their dressing rooms for a brief rest (as is the Canadian custom) between the second and deciding fall.

Upon their return to the ring, Lewis and De Glane locked grips and fell to the mat. The action on the mat was fast, and to spectators the contestants appeared a tangle of arms and legs.

Suddenly, the air was pierced by screams. The spectators stood on their chairs to see the ring. The screams continued. They were issuing from De Glane’s throat.

The surprised Lewis released his hold and sprang to his feet. De Glane rolled about the mat holding his breast and screaming. Pulling De Glane to his feet, the referee managed to quiet the noisy grappler and inquired the trouble. De Glane pointed to a wound on his breast, accusing Lewis of biting him.

The referee examined the injury, while Lewis protested, then awarded the third and deciding fall and the title to De Glane on a foul.

It was afterwards charged by Lewis that between the second and deciding third fall, while De Glane was resting, Dan Koloff took De Glane into a washroom, bit De Glane on the breast, then instructed the wrestler how to act when he tangled with Lewis for the final fall. Bowser had finally revenged himself upon Lewis and Sandow.

As for the Damon and Pythias twins of wrestling, they quarreled, decided to part, and divided up the profits of many years' accumulation. Sandow allied himself with the Londos faction, Lewis' long standing arch enemies.

The "Strangler" found himself a capable wrestler unable to secure work. Needless to say, Lewis' defeat and the split of Sandow and "Big Ed" was pleasant news to the Londos group.

The members of that combine felt that a dangerous combination had been put out of the way when Sandow and Lewis parted.

Chapter 11

The James Boys Were Pikers

We have said before that the day in 1928 when Joe “Toots” Mondt left the Sandow-Lewis-Mondt combine, and began fighting his erstwhile pals, then did the star of Sandow begin to set on the mat horizon. It took time for “Toots” to kill off his one-time buddies, but he did the work well and effectively.

He found a willing ally in Ray Fabiani of Philadelphia, who was promoting wrestling in the Quaker City, and was politically powerful.

Starting with Richard Shikat, virtually an unknown matman to American fans, Mondt, in a short space of one year, 1928-1929, had received for Shikat recognition as World’s Heavyweight Champion in the states of Pennsylvania and New York, and had driven Sandow, Lewis and Bowser from those two states.

The groundless threat and fear of fixed officials and Sandow’s timidity when faced with a crisis permitted Mondt to eventually secure the upper hand in wrestling, and eliminate Sandow as an important factor in the wrestling picture, a dominance Mondt still enjoys.

An indefatigable worker, Mondt contacted the disgruntled promotorial elements who were not benefiting from the Sandow-Bowser-Lewis alliance and welded them into a combine that wrecked the new trust, which had been formed when Sonnenberg became champion.

As related by Jack Pfeffer, small time New York promoter, in a story published in the New York Daily Mirror, Ray Fabiani of Philadelphia, Jack

Curley and Rudy Miller of New York, Rudy Dusek, who ruled south of the Mason and Dixon line, Ed White of Chicago, and Mondt decided that Shikat lacked the color necessary to lure the big wrestling gates, and a new champion should be proclaimed in Pennsylvania. Here's Pfeffer's own story of the manipulations which made Jim Londos World's Heavyweight Champion claimant, and a never to be forgotten figure in wrestling:

Londos had been thrown fourteen times by "Strangler" Lewis, six times by Wladek Zbyszko, three times by Stanislaus Zbyszko, and also by Renato Gardini, Jack Sherry, George Calza and Ed Santel. He was colorful, though, and appealed to the women fans.

Ed White, Londos' manager, came to New York to meet me, Rudy Miller, "Toots" Mondt and Jack Curley. "People are tired of the situation that exists in wrestling. What we need is a new champion; one who has color. We'll make Londos champion and we'll all get rich," White said.

Rudy Miller, Jack Curley and myself were to get five percent of Londos' earnings. Mondt, who was already cutting Londos for 25 percent as a partner of Tom Packs, Ed White and Londos in the St. Louis faction, was to continue to split up with these three, sharing equally in the profits after the others in on the jackpot had been taken care of.

Besides our 15 percent, the kitty was to be socked for 7% percent for Ray Fabiani, the Philadelphia promoter, who was to put on the match that was to make Londos champion; and 5 percent was to go to Hans Steinke, who was Londos' policeman.

The agreement reached, Londos and Shikat wrestled in the rain in Philadelphia, June 8, 1930, and Londos was crowned champion. That ushered in a new and prosperous era in wrestling. In 1930 we had a big boom and everyone who was cutting in on Londos made lots of money. The champion wrestled Ray Steele, Jim McMillen, George Zaharias, Gino Garibaldi and Karl Pojello dozens of times in all the larger cities, always winning. If Londos engaged in a shooting match in all that time, he did it without my knowledge. He refused to meet anyone but these same stablemates.

Money, they made indeed. By Mondt's own admission to the writer, he, Jack Curley, Rudy Miller, Ed White and Jack Pfeffer split a total year's earning which gave them ninety thousand dollars each in the New York promotions alone. Figure that in addition, Mondt was cutting in on the wrestling earnings of several wrestlers besides, and you have a fair idea what this "Barnum of Bounce" was making. Actually, you may ask, "What manner of man was, and is, this fellow, Jim Londos?" To the wrestling insiders he is known as "Trimmer Jim," a picturesque sobriquet hung upon the Golden Greek's brow years ago by the always alert Joe Marsh. Years ago, prior to the World War, a Greek dish washer, yclept Christopher Teophelus, toured the west as "The Wrestling Plasterer." With his "stock troupe," consisting of Peter Sauer (Ray Steele) and others, he would appear in a town, begrimed with plaster, and at the proper moment, climb into a wrestling ring where Sauer or some other stooge was scheduled to wrestle, and issue a challenge which was usually backed with the money of some unwary local sucker.

It was the old carnival come-on again, and many a hapless Greek restaurant owner backed Londos ("The Wrestling Plasterer") against some mat stooge, only to see his savings go flooey.

Even the suckers finally get wise, and so, shortly before the Armistice, Christopher Teophelus, "The Wrestling Plasterer," inspired by Jack London, famed novelist, changed his name to Jim Londos, taking London's last name and substituting an S in place of the last letter, N. Though he changed his name he couldn't forget his old tricks.

One of the South's leading newspapers, The Memphis Commercial Appeal, in a dispatch published on January 24,1927, reported:

LONDOS HELD FOR FRAUD

Jackson, Tenn., January 23.—Attorney General T. J. Murphy announced that Jim Londos, the Greek wrestler, was held in Memphis, in connection with a pre-arranged bout and will be returned to Jackson for trial. Londos,

the Greek wrestler, was arrested on charges of larceny, deception, fraud, scheming and trickery. Late last night he was trying to post $25,000 bail. The warrant was issued (instead of obtained) at Jackson, Mississippi, by Mike Kassaras, who charged Londos with fraud.

Nice stuff, eh, keed? Well, "Trimmer Jim" had no easy time of it. For on January 24 the Memphis papers sent out a wire story reading:

LONDOS IN PRISON

Jim Londos, the Creek wrestler, was held in prison here on charges of fraud, and larceny, chicanery, scheming and trick. What one of the victims despoiled by Londos, the Creek wrestler, says:

Mr. Doc Hottum,
Memphis, Tenn.

Dear Sir:

Please pardon me for taking the liberty of writing to you, but I have received a letter from an acquaintance in connection with the crooked affair of Jim Londos, in which a man advises me to write to you about it. I have been defrauded of thousands of dollars through Jim Londos, who has ruined me. Since then, my wife and children are suffering. I have, in addition, lost my health. My friend in your city seems to believe there may be an opportunity for me to get my money back. If there is (such an opportunity), please advise me what, in your opinion, would be the best thing for me to do. I know that Londos is in trouble with a man in Jackson, Tenn., and his trial is scheduled for March 4th. I thank you for the trouble I have given you, as well as for any information you may give me. Trusting to hear from you soon, I am wholly yours,

James Psaris,
104 Market Ave.,
North Canton, Ohio.

Evidently sucker Psaris wasn't content with writing letters, for on March 19, 1927, the following affidavit was filed:

State of Ohio,
Stark County, S.S.
Affidavit of James Psaris.

Before me, the undersigned Notary Public for Stark County, in the State of Ohio, there appeared personally, James Psaris, who deposits and says under oath, that: He is a resident of the City of Canton, Stark County, Ohio; that during the last few years he has been living here; that in 1917 and 1918, he became acquainted with one named W. H. Barton and one named Jim Londos, and with a third party named "Doc H"; further states that during that time, W. H. Barton, was business manager of Jim Londos, who was a professional wrestler; that during the Spring of 1918, W. H. Barton advised the complainant to go to the city of Peoria, Illinois, where a group of people, his manager, Barton and the one called "Doc" were giving a series of wrestling performances, and at the same place, W. H. Barton, obtained from the complainant the sum of Fifteen Hundred Dollars ($1,500.00) under false pretenses and fraudulently, falsely representing and promising to him the said amount would be returned to the complainant in a few days.

This sum of money, however, has never been returned and Barton, Londos, "Doc" and the others constituting the clique, disappeared suddenly from Peoria, and later Barton, Londos and "Doc" appeared in Detroit, Michigan. Information reached the complainant regarding the whereabouts of Barton and "Doc" and he says that these people were taken under warrant to Canton, where a preliminary hearing was held before the local examining officer, and that Barton and "Doc" were arraigned before a superior court.

At the preliminary hearing, which was held before Squire Charles Hemminger, it was proved that the fifteen hundred dollars ($1,500.00) supplied by the complainant was divided between W. H. Barton, Jim Londos, and a third person named "Doc," and, who, according to the

following information given by the complainant, was connected with W. H. Barton.

When the said Barton and "Doc" were imprisoned, in the prison of Canton, Stark County, Ohio, the said Jim Londos approached the complainant and offered to settle the controversy with a promissory note for five hundred dollars ($500.00), payable in installments, and one hundred dollars ($100.00) in cash; that the complainant agreed to the proposition and received the sum of one hundred dollars ($100.00), together with the promissory note for five hundred dollars ($500.00), signed by W. H. Barton and Jim Londos. The note, says he, was not paid in accordance with the agreement, and the signers disappeared, and, according to the information of the complainant, the said W. H. Barton died in the city of Three Rivers, Michigan, a short time ago.

On February 2, 1926, this complainant obtained a judgment for the promissory note, filed under No. 46290, at the Court of Common Pleas, Stark County, Ohio, against W. H. Barton and Jim Londos, for the sum of seven hundred and thirty dollars ($730.00).

The note is now due and the sum of seven hundred and thirty dollars ($730.00) with interest at the rate of six per cent (6%) from February 9, 1926, is owed to the complainant. Nothing was stated by the complainant further.

Signed
James Psaris.

He signed under oath (Sworn to) March 19,1927. Certified, T. H. Drunkenbrod, Notary Public.

"Trimmer Jim" managed to wriggle out of his legal difficulties, however, and went his merry way until the summer of 1927, when his wily methods again got him into trouble. The Monroe (La.) News-Star of Saturday, July 16, 1927, said:

A fair gate at the Forsythe baseball park last night was thoroughly disgusted with as big a wrestling farce as has ever been pulled in the local arena. Not even the admitted "Lie-down" of George Vasell to Rudy Dusek in their last engagement here some time ago, excelled in obvious fakery the stunt of last night.

Jim Londos, 195 pound Greek Champion, was supposed to wrestle Count Zarynoff, 195 pounds, Russian champion. Instead, they put on a fifteen minute exhibition match, with the Count taking the aggressive. When the timekeeper called fifteen minutes, at Londos' request, Londos grabbed Zarynoff and threw him in two minutes, making seventeen minutes total for the first fall. It was nearly train time.

To avoid lengthy description, suffice it to say that Londos scored the second fall in twenty seconds, and then, according to the Monroe (La.) News-Star;

Jim Londos arrived at the Missouri Pacific depot almost immediately after the match. Was Jim fully dressed? No, he wore his ring togs, a bathrobe and a straw hat. He was so intent on catching his train he couldn't stop to dress. Jim passed through Monroe between trains and made two hundred and fifty dollars. He worked on the theory Barnum extolled. The Count and Jim Londos came to Monroe on the same train. They have "worked" in matches before.

Now about promoter Bobby Manziel. He admits the two wrestlers meshed him up. He admits something went wrong. He refunded money to several patrons as they passed out of the park last night. Manziel authorized the statement that he would never card either of the two men again. He had tried for months to get Londos here, but the Greek contender did not regard Monroe as more than a stop-over between trains, for which stop-over he raised his guarantee on the day of the match to $250.00.

Catch on? "Trimmer Jim" taking the country bumpkin promoter for some easy money with a wrestling partner in town. Into the town and the bout ends in time for the principals to catch the last train out.

Quoting the State Athletic Commissioner, the News-Star continued: The deputy commissioner said he would not say the match was crooked or framed, but that he could say the two men did not give their best services, and that he believed the match had been fixed so Londos could catch the 9:15 train.

Kind of convenient for a contest to end just at train time, eh?

On Thursday, August 25, 1927, the same paper published a letter from J. C. Marsh, the Joe Marsh of the Plestina days, in which Marsh said:

Friends of mine in the east sent me clippings regarding the so-called wrestling match which Jim Londos and Count Zarynoff pulled in your city. They are old playmates and have pulled their brother act many places. Several months ago, at Evansville, Indiana, these two birds met in what was advertised as a wrestling match. The match was promoted by Joe Varga, another of their kind. Zarynoff won the first so-called fall in seven minutes. Londos won the second so-called fall. Then Zarynoff claimed he was hurt and refused to come back. I have a letter before me now from Mr. Loren H. Kiely, county attorney of Evansville, telling me these facts. Zarynoff and Londos have pulled their stunts all over the country, and I am glad to see they got nailed in one of them. I mean the one they pulled in your place.

Londos is wrestling in this city (Los Angeles) now. They have a commission in this state, also, but Londos seems to be okeh. I mean meeting his buddies and getting away with it.

If you want more data on Londos and Zarynoff, write Doc Hottum, Memphis, Tenn. That will reach him. He will give you some of their performances around there. Mr. Loren Kiely, No. 6, Furniture Building, Evansville, Indiana, can also give you plenty of what these two pulled in Evansville, Indiana. I, myself, can also give you plenty.

I do not live here. I am out here on a trip. I live in Chicago, but will be out here for a couple of months yet. My Chicago address is 300 West Adams

Street, Suite 829, Chicago, Ill. Hoping you keep the fakers out of your state,

Very truly yours,

J. C. Marsh.

It was, of course, the old trust buster trying to bust Londos and his growing power, but Marsh always had his data correctly and at his finger tips.

As one wrestler once expressed it, "Londos is so crooked, four guys were in a Turkish bath with him and when one of the fellows dropped a ten dollar bill, he was afraid to stoop over to pick it up because Londos was behind him."

Londos was exploited by Mondt, Curley, Pfeffer, Miller, et al, as the "Golden Greek," "The Greek Adonis," "The Statuesque Athenian," *etc.*

But during his "golden" era there was many a town he dared not appear in because of those early escapades.

Perhaps no greater betrayer of a people ever appeared before the public than Jim Londos, and this was the man who brought the fans to the box office by grace of Joe "Toots" Mondt's high pressure publicity during the Londos championship reign.

Sandow had shown skill in building up attractions, but Mondt far outdid the mighty Billy. Every kind of a freak imaginable was introduced to the wrestling rings of New York and Pennsylvania, and the country at large. There was big necked Ferenc Holuban, Fritz Kley, Serge Kalmikoff, long armed Leon Pinetzki and big footed Ivan Poddubny. Though wrestlers were frank in saying that none of them could wrestle, the freaks brought the crowds into the arenas.

These wrestling freaks were mere "palookas," but one after another, the men of greater ability served as fodder so that they might be built into

attractions worthy of providing Jim Londos with a Roman holiday in Madison Square Garden.

Londos drew tremendous crowds into Madison Square Garden and other arenas in the states of Pennsylvania and New York when the freaks were his opponents.

The fans read the publicity concerning these mat mastodons and went to see for themselves. Londos always won. The freaks were shipped to other parts of America and Canada until their popularity was played out.

Then the stars who had previously bowed in defeat before these heteroclite opponents were matched with them again. This time the stars won. The oddities were therewith shipped to their native heaths.

There were occasions when the fans got wise too quickly as to one of the imported minotaur's abilities. Ivan Poddubny is a case in point.

Ivan Poddubny, billed and circused as the Russian Cossack, won fame in American wrestling rings by virtue of his handlebar Von Hindenburgs and big feet.

He was sixty years of age when Jack Pfeffer brought him to America. So powerful and effective was the publicity ballyhoo, Poddubny became one of matdom's wonder men overnight. It took the great Joe Stecher one hour and forty minutes to beat Ivan on a supposed fluke, February 1, 1926. (The old finish stuff again).

A few nights later the Poddubny myth was accidentally exploded. Pfeffer permitted the aged Ivan to enter the ring with a second rate wrestler named Tommy Draak. The latter wouldn't have lasted with Stecher more than five minutes in a shooting match. Draak double crossed Pfeffer. He threw Poddubny in twelve minutes.

The inference is apparent. It took Stecher almost two hours to subdue Poddubny, while a second-rater managed it in twelve minutes. The

combination shipped Poddubny back to Russia in a hurry.

Another peculiar incident caused the gullible fans to speculate a trifle. Londos met and defeated Jim McMillen in a match at Madison Square Garden. Next day the news got into the papers that during the bout with McMillen, Londos had suffered a broken leg. Londos didn't wrestle again for several months.

Narrow minded and probing persons began asking themselves and each other why McMillen hadn't been able to throw Londos when the New York champion had broken his leg.

It seemed to the curious, and rightly so, an almost physical impossibility for a wrestler to win with a broken leg.

Years before, Cutler supposedly had been forced to concede defeat to Stecher because of a sprained ankle. Why, if McMillen was as skilled as press and promoters declared him to be, hadn't he seized the opportunity and beaten Londos? For the reader's information, the jury is still out on this problem.

Wrestling became so popular during the Londos era it threatened to engulf all other professional sports.

In cities like New York, Philadelphia, New Haven, Chicago, Baltimore and Washington, fans stormed arenas where the statuesque Greek pretender to the wrestling throne appeared, and police emergency squads were frequently called out to prevent the fans from breaking down the doors.

Londos met his hand-picked opponents in bouts night after night, sometimes locking grips with the same wrestler four times in one week, in different cities of course.

The number of times he "wrestled" Ray Steele, Rudy Dusek, Gino Garibaldi, Sammy Stein, Karl Pojello, and Jim McMillen in "matches" advertised for the title runs into the hundreds.

The gates for these bouts totaled thousands of dollars. In fact, after meeting Steele in some sixty-eight “contests,” Londos “wrestled” the latter in an open air “match” at the Yankee Stadium, New York. The bout drew close to seventy thousand dollars, a new high for wrestling gates in New York, a record never since equaled in the New York metropolitan area in money or gullibility on the part of meat tossing enthusiasts.

Night after night, Londos wrestled, with the fans never seeming to question his ability to engage supposedly tough opponents in punishing matches for the title. So bold was Londos he booked two bouts for one night, throwing a man in Jersey City, then rushing by cab to Bayonne, New Jersey, a nearby town, to engage in another “defense” of his “title.”

Matmen were supposedly punished beyond human endurance, were knocked senseless and suffered untold tortures during their bouts, but the next night found the same bonecrushers appearing in other cities.

Barnum certainly knew his stuff when he said, “The American public likes to be fooled.” He must have foreseen Jim Londos and the new wrestling era.

Chapter 12

The Barnums of Bounce

Wrestlers are men who should be put under observation instead of contract.

Their ring pirouettings not only indicate a more than slight cerebral swelling and concussion, but without question prove to the mothers of the world that birth control should be vested in the Margaret Sangers of the Universe.

Though they draw huge crowds to stadiums and perform upon the mat multifarious deeds of daring, these childlike bonebreakers are problem children to the promoters throughout the world.

They may be underhanded and intriguing pachyderms in their own business, but once divested of matters grappling, they become fit subjects for a psychopathic ward.

The greatest of all the catch-as-catch-can practical jokers is Ray Steele, a harlequin hoyden from Glendale, California. It took an idiot to measure Steele's capabilities correctly.

Steele visited a former wrestler at the California asylum for the insane at Paton. After a few minutes of what Steele believed to be cheering conversation and good, riotous fun, the lunatic fastened a soulful look upon his visitor and suggested:

"Ray, you ought to come in here and join me. I think you're sick, too."

For once even the usually gabby Steele was at a loss for an answer to this appraisement of his intelligence quotient.

The inrush into the United States of foreign bonecrushers brought about a new high in the dizzy dalliances of the muscle stretchers.

One of the most notable and laughable freaks who tickled the risibilities of the matmen was big-necked Ferenc Holuban of Hungary, advertised as "The Man Without a Neck." Holuban wore a twenty-two-inch collar, stood a little over five feet five inches, and couldn't, if he had been required, wrestle his way out of a bunch of bananas. It didn't take long for the wily "Toots" Mondt to circus this monstrosity sufficiently to draw sellout houses with Jim Londos, Ray Steele and other top-notch meat tossers.

If the fans could have been let in on the backstage scenes they would have found that these scarecrows were more laughable away from business than their arena antics indicated.

In the Saturday Evening Post of December 14, 1935, Milton MacKaye related several amusing anecdotes concerning Holuban and others of his ilk. According to MacKaye, the Holuban side-splitter was related to him by New York Promoter Jack Curley himself.

As MacKaye tells it, Holuban spoke no English and so he was entrusted to the care of a Hungarian journalist, who brought him through the customs and established him in a boarding house. Curley had arranged, for seven o'clock the following evening, a dinner of welcome, one of those hands-across-the-sea affairs at which the Hungarian consul, newspaper men and as many celebrities as could be conveniently corralled were to be guests.

Unknown to Curley, the Hungarian journalist went through Holuban's wardrobe the day of the dinner and discovered that the wrestler had no dinner jacket. Indeed, he discovered that Holuban had only one suit to his name, a light brown affair that seemed in doubtful taste.

This dismayed the journalist; he told Holuban that the American custom demanded that in the absence of dinner clothes, he must at least provide himself with a dark suit. This was an apparently insuperable difficulty. It

was quite impossible to fit Holuban, who weighed several hundred pounds more than he had any right to, in a ready-made suit. The journalist finally hit upon a solution—the brown suit could be dyed. The dinner guests convened that evening at seven.

At 7:30 Holuban had not yet arrived. At 8:15 Curley ordered the dinner served and sent couriers to find the guest of honor. They found him at his boarding house, shaved and pomaded—and in his underwear. His brown suit was still at the dyer's; the color had been changed, but the garment stubbornly refused to dry.

One of the couriers rushed to the tailor shop, snatched the suit from the drying room, took out the dampness with a borrowed electric iron. Three hours late, Holuban arrived at his dinner, conservatively clad in black.

Reporter MacKaye, who from necessity had to depend upon the veracity of Promoter Curley's own historical memoirs, however, missed many of the freakish and unrelated sidelights of these foreign mastodons.

The evening of the Holuban dinner, which was given in Madison Square Garden's swanky millionaire's club, with such Manhattan notables as Damon Runyon, Tammany District Leaders Mike Kennedy and Harry Perry present and a goodly assortment of Fourth Estate freeloaders enthusiastically guzzling gratis booze, beer and food, Holuban was seated between this reporter and Grantland Rice.

The latter and your chronicler noticed Holuban's huge appetite. Before the banquet was well under way, Holuban had devoured ten sirloin steaks. Rice mentioned this to the Hungarian interpreter. That worthy relayed the comment to Holuban. Without looking up from his eleventh steak, the mat freak shrugged his shoulders rather soulfully and muttered some unintelligible comment.

The interpreter turned to Rice, "Mr. Holuban says," he stated, "that he's hungry, of course, but he can't eat too much food here with so many

watching him. His mother always taught him that when he was out in company he should eat and drink sparingly."

Reporter MacKaye interestingly covered, however, the pogo-stick-like antics of Serge Kalmikoff and other freaks whom Mondt had Jack Pfeffer bring here at his behest.

Ivan Linow, great Russian who later became a movie actor of considerable villainous note, and Kala Pasha, another bearded mat terror who changed his name from Patrick Murphy and garbed himself as a roaring Turkish terror, were the first of the hirsute brigade whom Mondt, Sandow and Lewis had praise-agented during the days of the "Gold Dust Trio."

When Mondt was on his own and fighting his old partners, "Toots" stopped at little or nothing to get the shekels into the box office. Kalmikoff, a former tailor on New York's East Side, had wrestled under his own name, Serge Orlov. It was Pfeffer who called him Kalmikoff, but Mondt made his former East Side tailor protege grow a beard and coached him in the art of theatricalism.

Kalmikoff was in the United States on a worker's permit, and so fast did the money roll in, despite the various cuts Pfeffer made into the purses, that he soon became intractable and wanted to return to his homeland. Mondt was never one to spare the feelings of "those furrin lice," as he described them in his own colorful Colorado patois.

Reverting to Reporter MacKaye again, he says it was "Kalmikoff's habit to roar like a lion in the ring and to stand twirling his whiskers as his opponent charged. Since that time beards have become almost standard equipment. No show now is complete without at least one set of Dundrearies or a challengingly neat Vandyke."

Kalmikoff talked very little English, but he knew well the crowd-pulling value of his beard. After his first tour here, he became engaged in a quarrel with Mondt.

During his angry conversation with Kalmikoff, ignorant of the fact that Curley had signed a contract to bring back the Cossack the following season, Mondt outlined succinctly what he considered to be Kalmikoff's weaknesses as a wrestler and as an individual. The Cossack walked out in a fury. Forty-five minutes later he returned. He kicked open the door to Mondt's office. Kalmikoff's lace curtains were gone; the bountiful harvest of crisp black foliage had been denuded and there was only a powdered, shorn chin to show for the years of careful culture. Kalmikoff enjoyed Mondt's horrified glance a moment. Then he spoke. "Ya-a-a-a-h!" he said derisively, and dashed for the boat for Europe. Mondt was not at a loss for a Kalmikoff substitute, however. A former Miami, Florida, policeman, who had lost his post because of his over-friendliness with Al Capone, had been hanging around Mondt's office begging for a chance to exhibit his wares.

Mondt called his press agent, Alex Sullivan, into his office and commanded:, "Go to work on Frank Levitt."

"What can I say about him?" asked Sullivan.

"Say," commanded Mondt, "he is 'Man Mountain Dean' from Norcross, Georgia. He's managed by his wife, Dora Dean. He's one of those back-in-the-hills tramps that has had no experience in professional wrestling, but when he gets on the mat he tears his opponents to pieces. He weighs three hundred and fifty pounds and when he lands on a sucker the guy knows he's been landed on."

Sullivan seemed startled out of his usual sang froid.

"You're not talking about Solder Levitt, the fellow who was in the A. E. F. and then came home and fought a while and was a real tanker, are you?" he asked Mondt.

Mondt was calm.

“Now, Alex,” he replied, “you may be talking about him, but I’m talking about the Georgia Hill Billy, Man Mountain Dean. He’s out growing a bushy beard and five weeks from now he won’t even know he was born in the same Tenth Avenue tenement house as George Raft and Jimmy Cagney.”

Sullivan obediently set to work, and within a few months Man Mountain Dean was the sensation of the mat moguls. Sellout houses greeted his every appearance, and in bouts with Jim Londos, Vincent Lopez, “Strangler” Lewis, Ray Steele, et al, he established records that still stand.

Dean made one error in judgment that cost him considerable pain both financially and physically. In 1935 he met and defeated Ed “Strangler” Lewis in St. Louis.

En route by train to Philadelphia, the “Georgia Hill Billy” boasted to admirers of the ease with which he beat Lewis. The word got back to big Ed.

Lewis, Dean and Mondt were stopping at the Penn Athletic Club in Philadelphia. One morning Lewis came down to the lobby searching for “Toots.” Only Dean was in evidence and Lewis inquired of Mondt’s whereabouts.

“He’s over in Ray Fabiani’s office,” replied Dean. “Come with me and I’ll take you there.” Going out the front door, Lewis courteously stepped aside and permitted his late opponent to go first. As they reached the pavement, Dean turned to Lewis and said, “Ed, I just now thought how tings has changed for me and you. Ten years ago I usser folly you out them doors and now you folly me. I guess you better grow a beard if you want to keep in my class.”

Furious, but cautious, big Ed merely smiled and awaited his chance to get even.

It came weeks later in St. Louis, where Lewis himself had arranged to meet Dean in a return match. Dean entered the ring, believing he was going to win. His hopes were soon rudely dispelled. Lewis gave him the worst beating any man had ever received in five minutes in a wrestling ring, and after polishing off the crippled synthetic hill billy he finished with the remark: “Frank, you were right at the Penn A. C. Hereafter you go back to following me through the doors. For guys like you Emily Post is just a piece of fencing.”

Love, too, plays an important part in the bonecrushing scheme of life. One of the most notable episodes concerns a prominent wrestling promotional figure who fell in love with the wife of a catch-as-catch-can friend. This big-eared Don Juan kept matters arranged so that the wrestler’s spouse remained in New York City while the grappler filled dates at far-away points.

Christmas time was approaching and the mat promoter decided he would like to buy a nice present for his married sweetheart. He conveyed the information to the faithless matron.

“It would break my husband’s heart,” she said, “if he knew I was cheating on him. I would like a mink coat for Christmas, but he would know I was unable to pay for it out of the money he gives me. If you can figure some way to get around it so that I could have the present, I’ll take it.”

The wrestling manipulator meditated for a time and then arrived at a happy solution. A week before the husband was to return, he and his wedded concubine selected a $5,000 coat at an expensive New York fur shop. The mat prompter paid cash for the garment. Then he said to the errant wife, “Now I’ll take the coat and pawn it for $20.00, and when your husband comes back to New York I’ll give him the pawn ticket and suggest he redeem it.” This plan met with the wife’s approval, and the details were executed.

When the husband returned to New York, the wrestling manipulator handed him the pawn ticket, saying, “I found this ticket on the street. According to the notation $20.00 was borrowed on a woman’s fur coat. Why not go down to the hock shop and redeem the coat? Maybe it is good enough to give your wife for a Christmas present.”

Weeks passed and the wife reported back to her sweetheart that she had not received the coat. When the pachyderm husband returned from one of his many trips, the manipulator met him and asked, “What did you ever do with that pawn ticket I gave you?”

The wrestler said, “I redeemed the coat, and it was a swell mink and I gave it to a girl of mine in Chicago.”

The mat manipulator soon learned, however, the name of the girl who had benefited from his generosity. Some months later he visited the home of his parents in Chicago and there was his $5,000 mink, gracing the form of a married sister.

One of the most laughable love episodes in a grappler’s life was exposed by one of the more prominent bonecrushers. Together with a pal whom he was wrestling in Houston, Texas, they called upon a sweetheart in the Texas city.

After a short visit with the girl, both wrestlers left her home and en route to the Hotel Rice, the mat grappler told his “best” friend, “I am going to marry that girl, and she is madly in love with me. After we wrestle tomorrow night and you win, I want you to go to Memphis with us and be the best man at the wedding.”

This information seemed to interest his wrestling buddy. “Does she know anything about our business?” he asked.

“No, she ain’t wise to wrestling at all,” replied the swain.

The next day, the about-to-be Benedict decided to call again on his intended. When he arrived at her home he found the door ajar and entered her apartment without knocking. He was startled to find her and his wrestling friend in a fond embrace. After denunciations, she attempted to explain her wandering from the straight and narrow pathway.

"You don't appreciate what I've been doing for you," she said. "I knew you were going to wrestle here tonight, and that we were going to be married in Memphis tomorrow. I wanted to make sure that you would win your bout, so I only submitted to Earl's advances so as to weaken him and make him easy for you to beat."

Like schoolboys completing the fourth grade are the modern mat mastodons. Ray Steele, Ernie Dusek, Ted and Vic Christie and Jack Humberto, all have their little tricks which to them are the most amusing of pranks.

Dusek carries a small twine cutter's knife and uses it effectively to sever neckties from unsuspecting conversationalists' throats. Humberto, George Zaharias, the Christies, Jack Reynolds, and various others are devotees of a powder that makes luckless persons itch and scratch, or resort to the well known Mickey Finn, often used by saloon keepers to calm recalcitrant patrons.

Steele, it was, who kept the country yokel, Fred Grubmier, in subjection for months, during the latter's first New York City visit, by compelling "Grubby" to pay a supposed gangster tribute of ten cents per floor penalty each time the Iowa yokel used the Hotel Lincoln elevators, and it was Steele, too, who had an overly garbed feminine-like male pursuing the embarrassed "Grubby" through hotel lobbies and into wrestling club dressing rooms, with proposals of "marriage."

"Hell's fire," commented the flustered "Grubby," "she was dressed just like a woman, and good lookin', too, and only the fact I have a fine wife kept me from fallin' for her an' acceptin' her proposals. An' then one of the

boys tells me she's a man and I give her the gate. But it wasn't without a struggle."

Hans Steinke scores with his experience when first he tangled with Jim Clinkstock, one of "Toots" Mondt's rug peddlers, whom the redoubtable "Toots" made into a wrestler and garnered for him a fortune of fifty thousand dollars.

Clinkstock was wrestling Steinke, who wristlocked him.

Evidently Hans put on more pressure than intended, for Clinkstock howled with anguish. Slowly Hans' immense rear end began settling in Clinkstock's face. With a roar of anguish, Jim brought his face in contact with the seat of Steinke's tights and bit. When we say bit, we mean hard. With a yowl, Hans released his hold.

Later in the dressing room Hans shouted at Clinkstock: "Whyfore you bite me in the pants like a dog when I'm in the ring with you?"

"Whyfore," replied Clinkstock, "did you hurt my wrist?"

The late Honorable Marion Zioncheck, the dizzy Congressman from the state of Washington, may have startled American citizens with his daffy deeds during the Spring and Summer of 1936, and the Dean Boys, Dizzy and Daffy, baseball pitchers deluxe, have had reams of newspaper print devoted to their peccadilloes, but theirs were motivated publicity seeking stunts.

The wrestler, like the famed Jimmy Walker line, "can match his private and public life with any man's," and the bonecrushers will defy any man to equal their private lives in the comparison.

Westbrook Pegler, excellent reporter of the United Feature Syndicate, says: There are two distinct types of goofiness—the genuine and the imitation.

The late Rube Waddell, the left-handed pitcher, was a nut at heart, and ate animal crackers in bed in the dark, proving that he was goofy on or off.

Battling Siki, the Senegalese prizefighter, also erstwhile, was even goofier than Waddell, and once caused a riot by giving away $20 bills—a prank which the Hon. Dizzy Zioncheck was not likely to imitate.

I believe Chief Chewaki, the Indian wrestler from Poland, whose correct name is Czewalski, also can be classed as a true nut. Chief Chewaki is the one who hit upon the idea of dusting his wrestling tights with sneeze powder, and clamping his mighty thighs over the head of his opponent, who would then succumb in a spasm of sneezes. He also had a trick of hiding a loop of baling wire, like a dog-catcher's snare, in his corner and reaching for it in critical moments to strangle his adversary.

Chief Chewaki, or Czewalski, was ejected from various rings by indignant referees, menaced by angry crowds, and fined by prize fight commissions on numerous occasions for soiling the fair escutcheon of sport, but I never heard of his turning square.

In commenting upon sports figures, and wrestling nuts in particular, Pegler only scratched the surface, however. He forgot Texas Dick Raines, who used to bang his head against steam pipes to toughen himself. He omitted the name of George Koverly, lover of dogs, whose own pet canine eats, sleeps and guzzles beer and booze with his lord and master.

Matman Gino Garibaldi thinks it rare sport to startle house guests with firecrackers, stink bombs or table candles that shoot fireworks high in the air.

Collapsible chairs, folding toilets, breakdown beds and imitation horse manure placed in bedrooms are other pranks indulged in by the mat marvels while they rest between the acts.

Reverting to Steele again, he leads the pack in dizzy didoes.

At a hunting lodge in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, his place is one gag after another. Luckless, indeed, is the person who feels the call to nature and must rush madly to the little back house behind the Steele hunting lodge.

The door closes and the guests in on the fun gather round. The luckless victim of another Steele prank relaxes comfortably on the toilet seat and then the humor starts.

For the pressure of his behind causes the wall of the little back house to collapse outwardly, and there, revealed in a primitive pose, is seated the surprised guest.

Little Joe Bever, synthetic Indian, thinks it's great advertising to order and consume a roast dog. Joe Marvin startled even his own goofy cohorts when he sued a young woman for breach of promise, studied aviation, and graduated from a detective school with a diploma, a badge, and a complete set of disguises.

Steele's nuttiness has often been tinged with rare humor, however.

There was the evening in Jack Corcoran's Toronto wrestling club when a friend confided to Ray that he had dated two society girls to make the rounds with them that night after the matches.

"They are Canadian society girls," confided the Pal, "so be nice and polite to them, Ray. When we meet don't get fresh with them. Start easy. Talk about painting, travel, society, banking, books, and golf, then work around to other things."

"Don't worry about me, Pal," assured Steele.

Ray and his Pal were hardly seated in the cab which was to take the society girls and their escorts to a night club, then Steele turned to his girl companion and asked:

“Have you ever been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City?” “No,” she answered.

“Have you ever been to Russia; met Mrs. Vanderbilt; had a father who is a banker; read the Congressional Record or played golf?” continued Steele.

“Nope,” replied Steele’s feminine companion.

“Then,” said Ray hopefully, “Whatta ya say we go to my hotel room and get right down to business?”

“By God,” earnestly commented Steele’s wrestling Pal, “I’ll say one thing for you, Ray. You kept your word and first talked about the things I asked you to, before you propositioned her.”

Chapter 13

The Promoters

And what manner of men were and are these present day promoters of wrestling matches? Who are they, where did they come from, and how much have they made, and how do they stay in business?

Ah, my friends, questions indeed.

Most of them came from the back alleyways of large cities. They maintain their positions as dominant factors through political connections. They remain unique in the annals of American promotional sportsdom, not because of their great talents and contributions toward the advancement of American progress, but due to their utter disregard of the citizenry and their abilities to play upon the credulity of the public and their co-partners.

Jack Pfeffer entered the wrestling picture with big footed Ivan Poddubny. Pfeffer, known to the New York's sports fraternity as the "halitosis kid," is a medium-sized Russian Jew, who first came to America as a combination stage hand and porter with Pavlowa's Ballet.

Possessed of a twisted mind and an entirely unscrupulous attitude toward grapplers, newspapermen, co-partners and promoters, Pfeffer has managed by chiseling and penny pinching to accumulate a small fortune. His attitude toward bonecrushing is expressed in his often reiterated statement:

"H'its hall ha Carniwaul wit ha bunch of fekers an de publeck hist nots to take hit serious, so what's hall about hit?"

His chiseling proclivities are best illustrated by an experience of Herbie Freeman, New York Heavyweight meat tosser, who met and was defeated

by Jim Londos in Manhattan's Madison Square Garden. The day after the Londos bout Freeman went to Pfeffer, who was Mondt's payoff man at the time, for his money. Pfeffer turned the check face downward on his desk when Freeman asked for his wages and in the most persuasive oily voice suggested.

"Hoiby, I haft yer check here for de money for de las night's bout. Now, Hoiby, you hendorse hit hon de beck of de chack and hi'll send hit to do benk for to cesh hit."

The then innocent Freeman, just three months out of City College and unfamiliar with the ways of wrestling promoters, endorsed the check, without looking at the front to ascertain the amount (Pfeffer kept his hand on the piece of paper so Freeman couldn't have turned it over without a struggle), and Pfeffer sent the check to the bank by messenger and had it cashed.

He then turned fifteen hundred dollars over to Freeman.

Mondt, who had heard about the transaction, went to Pfeffer.

"Say, Jack," he said, "I gave you a check for Freeman for twenty-five hundred dollars, and I understand you got him to endorse it and pocketed a thousand dollars of the check. Freeman told one of the boys in the dressing room last night at Jim Downing's Club in New Haven. Is that right?" "Sure, dot's right," responded Pfeffer. "An' why should a bum wrestler make twenty-five hundred dollars for faking when he is overpaid arredy by giving him fifteen hundred dollars? He never made dot much before in his life, so now he is richer and so am I, for being his meneger." Sammy Stein, Ivan Poddubny, Serge Kalmikoff, Ferenc Holuban, Freeman and countless other neckbenders all paid their tribute to Pfeffer. And, besides cutting in on promotional profits, Pfeffer made nearly a quarter of a million dollars chiseling from the matmen under his direction. He was tolerated by the other partners because of his aptitude for abusing recalcitrant bonecrushers who might get out of line, and he also dared to make small payoffs when the houses weren't up to expectations. In fewer words, Pfeffer did the dirty

work for Jack Curley and other eastern promoters and thus kept the books balanced. So his little side thieving was tolerated. There was so much frosting on the wrestling cake during the Londos era of big houses, that a matter of a quarter of a million dollars taken from unsuspecting matmen didn't bother the partners too much.

In this chronicle of the wrestling business and its machinations, the writer will only cover those promoters who are still actively engaged in presenting the neckbending extravaganzas.

Several who were once prominent in the business have fallen by the wayside, and recounting their characteristics would add nothing to the present cavalcade of bonecrushing history.

Charlie and Willie Johnston, better known as members of "The Royal Family" of pugilism, younger and less wily brothers of the redoubtable Jimmy Johnston, "Boy Bandit of Broadway," and many times boxing promoter and general manager of Madison Square Garden, came into wrestling with Paul Bowser of Boston, who brought them into the picture when he was attempting to buck the Londos popularity in New York City and Mondt's new combination.

Bowser and successors labored under the impression that the Johnstons wielded considerable political influence and could manipulate the New York State Athletic Commission.

Willie Johnston had been a sewing machine salesman when Bowser entered the Gotham mat picture, but the pickings from the Bowser offal were so much greater than those commissions derived from peddling sewing machines from door to door, that he soon forswore allegiance to the back door guardians and joined hands with his younger brother, Charlie.

Through the years elder frere Jimmy had been engaged in the business of piloting and promoting the leather pushers. Charlie had fronted for his elder sponsor. When he entered the grappling business under Bowser, Charlie was just again handling Jimmy's business, the latter's connection

with boxing making it impossible for him to juggle both industries successfully.

The Johnston Brothers proved and have proven to be mere babes in the woods when it came to handling the affairs of the scheming matmen and their promoters, but in serving as stooges for their connivings, the Johnston Brothers and various members of their families managed to earn considerable monies, far in excess of the services they returned to their benefactors. We'll hear more about these boys later.

Perhaps the most cultured and, therefore, the strangest promoter who ever entered the wrestling promotion game is Aurelio "Ray" Fabiani of Philadelphia. Fabiani was playing the violin in the Chicago Civic Opera Orchestra when he made the acquaintance of matman Renato Gardini, who functioned as a lieutenant in the "Big Four" combine of the pre-war era.

Gardini painted glowing pictures of the profits to be made from wrestling, and persuaded Fabiani to forsake opera for the bonecrushing business. With some fifteen thousand dollars in personal savings, and backed by a small fortune possessed by his father, Doctor Aurelio Fabiani, noted Quaker City physician, Fabiani and Gardini selected Philadelphia as the scene for their financial wrestling triumphs.

In a few short months, under Gardini's guidance, Fabiani was broke, but Gardini and the wrestlers who worked for him were strangely prosperous. It was the old army game of taking a sucker into camp. Gardini paid heavily (so he said) for political protection in Philadelphia. Various city officials had to be paid off and expensive leases for auditoriums were negotiated, which took all of Fabiani's ready cash.

"In fact," Fabiani says, "the big moment of my wrestling promotion career came one night when I eagerly phoned my wife with the information that the show that evening had been successful, and instead of going into the hole for several hundred dollars, we had just broken even on a twenty thousand dollar house."

Fabiani was on the financial ropes of wrestling promotion in 1928 when Mondt came to him with an offer to take him into the Londos partnership. Mondt knew of Fabiani's family background, and was well aware of Ray's ability to make invaluable friends in all walks of Pennsylvania life.

When he won over Fabiani, "Toots" secured a strong link for his chain wrestling combination. Shortly thereafter, with "Toots" doing the manipulating and Fabiani handling the promotion, his city became and has remained, one of the most important towns in America to wrestling combinations.

Fabiani recouped his wrestling losses sustained while "learning the ropes" from Gardini, and since has managed to pile up a huge fortune in well invested securities. Though various promoters have tried from time to time to compete with him in the City of Brotherly Love, his penchant for keeping in politically and socially with the right people has enabled him to withstand all mat assaults.

Up Boston Way, Paul Bowser, former topflight middleweight wrestler, holds sway as boss and promoter. Bowser started in the Bean City promotional game early in 1920, handicapped with the most heartbreaking conditions. Under a working agreement with the Sandow, Mondt and Lewis combine, he took some five thousand dollars in life's savings, quit wrestling, and with the help of his wife, Cora Livingstone, former woman wrestler, he tried his hand at staging wrestling contests in the old Boston Opera House.

His efforts seemed doomed to failure from the start. His first show drew a gross gate of ninety dollars, and so badly had the mat game fallen into disrepute, the Boston sports editors refused to give him a line of publicity on his shows.

After three unsuccessful financial efforts to stage profitable bouts at the Opera House, Bowser figured out his remaining bankroll and reasoned that if he proceeded carefully he could, at the current rate he was losing money, run about ten more shows, and if conditions didn't improve during the time

the bouts were being presented, he would have to close up shop. He decided on a desperate chance.

Borrowing a few thousand dollars, Bowser had one million passes printed, which entitled a fan to a seat at his next wrestling show. These passes were distributed throughout Boston and its environs. The night of his mat extravaganza at least a hundred thousand people tried to jam their way into the little Boston Opera House with the passes.

Riots ensued, the emergency squads were called out, people were injured, and the stories made the front page headlines in every New England newspaper. Then did the editors jump upon their sports editors. One said:

"There was a show last night at the Boston Opera House which drew one hundred thousand people. All wanted to see the bouts, and we didn't have a single line in our paper on the day of the show. Other athletic events get the space, but you ignore wrestling. We didn't even have a man there to cover the results of the bouts, and as a consequence, our sheet and every other newspaper in New England had to depend upon police reporters to tell us what went on there when the riots broke out."

These sentiments were expressed by nearly every newspaper editor and publisher throughout New England and, thereafter, Bowser had little trouble in securing serious attention from the Fourth Estate scribes.

His promotional star rose steadily, and Boston holds the all-time record for big wrestling houses, the matmen outdrawing every other sport in the Bean City. Up Boston way, they take their Bowser and wrestling mighty seriously, and Sonnenberg, George, Yvon Robert, Henri De Glane, "Strangler" Lewis, the Dusek Brothers, Danno O'Mahoney, and other star matmen are given the same attentions Dizzy Dean, Babe Ruth or Al Capone would rate.

One stunt put Bowser over.

“Monaco,” as Bowser is known in the code of the wrestling promoters, has built a nationwide reputation for himself among American sport scribes, wrestlers, and promoters. His word is sufficient for anyone who does business with him, and strangely enough, he has never in all his long associations in the mat business been known to yell “copper” when a competitor took an unfair advantage of him. Bowser prefers to work out his own destiny.

Jack McGrath of Worcester, Mass., promoter and onetime manager of Danno O’Mahoney, exists by virtue of Bowser’s friendship and tolerance. McGrath is a former wrestler who serves as front man and protector of Bowser’s champions during the latter’s cross-country hegiras.

The master of all clippers, who clips the wise guys, is Baltimore promoter Ed Contos. An aesthetic appearing Greek, Contos manages to make more money by poor shows than other promoters would with paying attractions. Though his town has never been one of the better and more profitable cities, his club is necessary to break the jumps between New York, Washington, or the southern tour wrestlers take.

Fifty and one hundred dollar touches here and there, give Contos a satisfactory living, though more important as a source of revenue is his great card playing talent. Ed manages to take almost as much away from the wrestlers who appear under his promotion, as the trust manipulators pay them for their bouts.

Nick Londos, Detroit’s oleaginous Greek promoter, exists, and has been tolerated among the bonecrushing master minds because of his friendship and relationship to Jim Londos and St. Louis promoter Tom Packs, both of whom were taken from restaurant dish washing jobs by Jim Londos, and started in the wrestling promotional racket.

In the Columbus, Ohio, area reigns Al Haft, who has at various times been aligned with several wrestling factions. Haft possesses a unique talent for jumping hither and thither among the warring bonecrushers, pledging his allegiance wherever he can secure the best deals at the moment.

Haft, a former wrestler, shirtmaker, and small restaurant owner of the coffee pot variety, first came into wrestling prominence as the manager of John Pesek, a Nebraskan grappler, who, for a time baited the Sandow, Mondt, and Lewis faction during its palmiest days.

More importantly, Haft controls the lighter wrestling titles, such as the light heavyweight, middleweight and welterweight crowns, and though his towns through the rural sections of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky draw small houses, in the hundreds where the heavyweights draw thousands, still the pygmy profits give Haft and his partners incomes which would be considered anything but small potatoes to a person who has had to work for a livelihood.

Though Greek wrestlers and mat promoters have pretty generally fallen into disrepute through their connivance and penchants for trimming the suckers, one man, Tom Packs of St. Louis, has remained through the years as not only one of the outstanding personages in what has sometimes been a deep dyed and odorous business, but a man ready at all times to shoot square with partners and competitors alike.

Packs built up a solidarity of friendship for himself in the Mound City, and all the scheming and double dealing of partners and competitors hasn't been able to shake him from his rock-like foundation.

Unlike most wrestling promoters, Packs has never believed that a contract was an agreement meant to be broken whenever it suited the convenience of either party. By the same token, Packs has constantly refrained from the courts of law whenever any members of the mat combinations have broken faith with him.

Though he has befriended countless out of work news scribes, lent a helping hand to charities, and financed St. Louis political campaigns, Packs' record as a square guy who won't holler has earned for him the respect few former dishwashers have been able to win for themselves in other cities of America.

He numbers more native-born Americans among his close friends and associates than Creeks, but his own countrymen respect him with the same degree as do other nationalities.

Loyalty has been the rock rib of Packs' long association with American business men, and while this attribute has cost him considerable sums of money at times, still it has served as warning to the schemers and parasites that Packs deals in only one fashion, straight from the shoulder.

Probably the most detached of all the mat big time promoters in America today is Los Angeles' Lou Daro. Totally uninterested in the various political machinations and inner schemes of the bonecrushing business, Daro long ago served notice on all factions that the men who could draw the money into his box offices were the grapplers who could work in his clubs.

Through strong Golden State political connections, Daro has been able to keep the bonecrushers in line by cracking the whip. In the years he has been promoting on the coast, Lou has staged many wrestling shows in which various charities cut in for huge slices of the gross gates.

These friends and contacts who have benefited through Daro's generosity, stand ready at all times to come to his political aid. This strength has served to maintain Daro's West Coast hold on the wrestling racket, despite the many changes in the business since Sandow, Mondt and Lewis first formed their "Big Trust."

Daro was a vaudeville strongman when he started in the mat game via the heretofore mentioned Renato Gardim. It didn't take the shrewd Daro long, however, to decide that if anyone was going to lose his money promoting mat bouts, he preferred to do it by himself. Thereafter he became outstanding as a successful stager of mat bouts and today, possessed of a fortune, he tells friends and supporters alike:

"I only promoted one fake wrestling match in my life. That was the bout between Pat McGill and Jack Taylor, and just as soon as I saw the boys up

there faking and heard the crowd was stamping and booing for action, I climbed right into the ring and threw them both out."

Only one fake Daro says, and cites the McGill-Taylor bout as proof.

It was probably the only on-the-level mat contest Daro ever did, or ever will promote.

For on the evening when McGill and Taylor were tossed out of a Los Angeles ring by the irate promoter, and charged with faking—they were out for blood—and shooting.

Chapter 14

Shylock Was A Spendthrift

When judgment day arrives for wrestlers, and the pearly gates are opened wide for the mat promoters, then will Jack Curley of New York and Ed White of Chicago, have their day in the celestial sun. White and Curley there, my friends, are two names that have figured prominently through the years in wrestling manipulations. White, slippery as the greased Gotch poor Hackenschmidt tried to grab, and Curley, combining all the histrionic talents of a Barrymore. At times belligerent, then plaintive or suave or even tearful. At the door of White is laid the unproven charge of being instrumental in the discharge of a prominent Chicago Sports Writer from one of the Windy City's leading papers.

Though now dead, here's the way the story was unfolded to the writer one night while the sportscribe in question and your historian (sic) were hoisting one last lager before the last train to Connecticut pulled out of the Grand Central Station.

When Billy Sandow, after the notorious Zbyszko double cross of Wayne Munn, decided to go ahead with the Lewis-Munn return match in Benton Harbor, Mich., it was White, working to accomplish his own ends, who engineered the discharge of the well-liked Chicago sporting writer, who at one time had borrowed one hundred dollars from him and failed to pay it back.

White had the canceled check, and when he could not persuade the sportswriter to attack Sandow, Mondt and Lewis through the sports pages of his paper, White's next move was to reveal the scribe's debt to the reporter's editor.

The discharge then followed, and it wasn't until the luckless journalist was broke, desperate, hungry and virtually shoeless, that he secured another job as press agent for Paul Bowser, one whom the discredited reporter had never befriended.

"What the hell was the difference?" asked Bowser once, when questioned as to his reasons for putting the scribe to work.

"He needed a job and I needed a fellow like him in my business. If he hit me below the belt it was because he was trying to befriend old man Levine (White's real name). I don't hold things like that against any newspaperman. Just because I may buy them a few drinks once in a while doesn't mean I own them body and soul."

Instances of White's dealing from the bottom of the deck with his own partners and wrestlers who were fighting for his promotorial life would add long pages to the annals of wrestling history.

He held his sway over the business through the years of gangster and political rule in Chicago when Morris Eller, "Big Bill" Thompson and other machine politicians were ready to do his bidding for small campaign contributions.

White's penny pinching proclivities with wrestlers and employees is best illustrated by an often repeated story of the office boy who went to him with a request for an increase in salary.

"Look here," said White to the lad, affectionately draping his arm around the boy's shoulders, "I want you to consider something. If I give you a raise, it means three dollars more a week added to your pay. For each month it means twelve dollars extra you'll be getting. In a year you will be having $156 more in pay." Here, White's voice grew louder, according to the listener-in. "In ten years," he continued, "you will have $1,560 out of my pocket, and in fifty, in fifty years, in fifty years—"

At this point White beat his temples furiously and gazed wildly at the by now chastened and frightened lad.

“Think of it!” he yelled at the boy. “In fifty years with that money, plus compound interest, you’d have me bankrupt.”

Ed White it was, however, who brought Jack Curley into the wrestling business. He picked him up as a waiter in a south side Chicago cabaret, changed Curley’s name from Jacob Schmul to that of Jack Curley, because of the latter’s curly hair, and started him off in the wrestling racket.

Curley had had some experience in the fight game as a rubber of Tommy Ryan, oldtime middleweight champion. White schooled Curley in the inner workings of the mat manipulations, but within a short space of time the pupil was showing the professor tricks he had never before dreamed of.

Their first joint efforts to pool their talents came in 1911, when in company with Jack Herman, Joe Coffey and Isador Herk, New York burlesque producer, they staged the return match between Gotch and Hackenschmidt at the White Sox Ball Park.

Three weeks before the bout it seemed a certain sellout, with approximately eighty thousand dollars in the box office at that time. The sponsors were making good use of these funds for promotional expenses. Then came the rude awakening. Hackenschmidt broke his knee and informed the promoters the bout would have to be called off.

Pandemonium reigned in the wrestling promoters’ headquarters when “Hack” broke the news of his own particular “break.” The sponsors realized that the ticket money, already spent, would have to be returned unless the bout came off as scheduled. They went to the luckless “lion” and by glib talking persuaded Hack to announce to the press and public that he was perfecting a new hold to cope with Gotch, and thereafter would do his training privately and his road work at night in order to avoid the intense lake front late summer heat.

Hackenschmidt agreed to this, provided that Gotch would permit him to win a fall during the bout, and that Gotch would carry him along and give him a show. Gotch gave his word. Thereupon, a substitute approximately Hackenschmidt's dimensions and general description did his night road work late every evening along the Lake Michigan beach while the promoters kept the curious from getting too close a view of the man going through the routine training paces.

The subterfuge was successfully passed off onto the public, and the day of the bout, September 4th, 1911, over one hundred thousand dollars had been paid by the eager fans who gathered to view the epic struggle between the great Frank Gotch and George Hackenschmidt.

The contest developed into the greatest fiasco ever perpetrated upon the American public. Hackenschmidt limped into the ring with his knees encased in splints. Gotch threw him two straight falls, and the enraged fans almost killed both participants and wrecked the ball park.

It would take pages to recount the infamy perpetrated upon Hackenschmidt by both Gotch and the promoters of the bout. The unsuspecting Russian proved to be no match for his American opponent. In the English Manchester News "Hack" recently said:

I knew Curley was loyal and generous. Whenever he spoke, sympathy and sincerity just streamed from him. When I reached Chicago I went into training at once with Jacobus Koch and Doctor Roller (Editor note—This is the same Roller who acted as Gotch's policeman and toured Europe with Gotch. Read carefully and see what you make of the turn of events). Gradually I got into perfect condition. One day I was wrestling Roller in training. I jumped up to free myself from a position and this time he did not try to hold me. He went up with me. As we got on our legs his right foot struck my right kneecap. I dropped to the floor and laid there like a log for six hours. My friends could do nothing for me. To keep the injury a secret I laid on the gym floor until dark, when they carried me back to my quarters. They put me to bed. In the morning I was treated, the leg was bandaged by

a doctor and I was taken home again. The doctor came twice a day and treated me, but my leg was terribly swollen.

I owed so much to the promoters I couldn't give up without a struggle, so I was photographed by newspapermen and though my knee was tightly bound, it was impossible for me to bend it. A few days before the match I went into the gym again to try wrestling. The moment I put any strain on the knee I experienced terrible pain. It was hopeless. I went back to my quarters.

The day of the match, four strips of plaster were stretched on my leg from the hip to the ankle. The knee was then bound in over twenty feet of rubber bandage four inches wide. I put on a pair of long green drawers so as to hide my real condition from the public. Doctor Roller lent me the wrestling drawers.

Koch wanted me to call the bout off. I refused. I entered the ring and told the referee to call all bets off. He refused to do so and I told him I'd walk out of the ring unless he did so. Then he did as I wished. I stood on one foot and we wrestled. Though I was crippled, Gotch couldn't get me down. I was in such poor shape I ended the whole dreary business myself. I went down twice but Gotch didn't do it. I lost two falls and went back to my dressing room.

In a Ring Magazine story concerning the late Gotch, the late Ed Smith who refereed the notorious Gotch and Hackenschmidt affair said:

Frank Gotch's mighty toe hold was dinned into foreign invaders. It was the first thing a foreign wrestler heard when he landed in America. In various languages and gestures this yellow flag was waved before the terrified foreign invader. It got to be part of the managerial ritual, this American juggernaut.

Most of the yarns were sheer figments of imagination. Frank Gotch never won an important match in his entire career with the toehold…the toehold made of Frank Gotch a brute, a type of relentless killer who

delighted in mayhem…breaking ankles…twisting knees…while he chuckled high in glee as he gloated in their misery.

Smith goes on to say Gotch did not originate the toehold, it being as old as wrestling, and that the Humboldt Horror merely used it for feinting purposes to get an opponent into position. He further says:

Gotch received twenty thousand dollars for the bout and one thousand for training expenses…Hack got thirteen thousand five hundred dollars… That shell of a man who appeared in the afternoon for the bout wasn't even a tough man…The first fall was fourteen minutes, the second five minutes, the bout ending in boos and catcalls.

After the leg injury came commands from the frantic Curley and his co-promoters, who were fingering a tremendous advance sale, a portion of it already spent in the advance promotion of the show. In his training quarters Hack fumed, raved like a crazy man, then went away by himself for hours. He would get out of bed at two in the morning to drag around the streets, in a fog…When he entered the ring on the day of the bout he limped…There was a gasp of astonishment from the crowd which, before the men started to wrestle, knew it was a fiasco…It was just a basket picnic for Gotch, with guava jelly and breast of partridge as luncheon bits. Immediately Gotch went to work on the injured leg. It's too farcical to recount in detail. After the match the disgruntled crowd sifted out of the ball park.

In these pages we have spoken of Gotch many times and the part he played in present day wrestling. Smith knew Gotch intimately and in his Ring Magazine statement said:

There were several times during the many I observed Frank Gotch that the thought flashed through my mind he wasn't one hundred per cent game. I saw absolute acts of cruelty on his part I didn't like. Always, I think the really courageous man, no matter how ferocious, and filled with the killing instinct and eager to win he may be, is willing to let up on a beaten foe and not punish needlessly or wantonly.

Suffice to say the Gotch-Hack fiasco lead to a shakeup all around in Chicago. The police department was turned over because nothing had been done about the gamblers and pickpockets who frequented the park during the bout, and wrestling remained dead for many a day in that city.

After the Chicago debacle Curley sought other fields of endeavor and New York was decided upon as his oyster. So the merry game went on.

Surprisingly enough, though he has, by various ruses, managed to grab considerable chunks of money from his many combination partners through the years, Curley has been tolerated because of his alleged political influence.

He was shrewd enough when he began his New York promotions to cut prominent charities in on nearly every show. Inasmuch as the monies given to the funds did not come out of his pocket but were paid by the wrestlers working on the card, who believed these expenditures were necessary to keep wrestling alive, Curley in reality lost nothing by his generosity and received all the credit and the glory.

In the years that followed the Gotch-Hackenschmidt debacle, Curley joined the best New York clubs where he could make necessary promotional contacts and allied himself with Mrs. William Randolph Hearst's Free Milk Fund for Babies, donating ten per cent of two huge promotions yearly to that charity.

This alliance helped him to hold his partners into line with the groundless threat that the Hearst newspaper chain would ruin wrestling all over the country unless he remained a partner in the combination.

Several times when his future appeared rocky and his partners were sharpening the ax for his head, Curley called upon the New York Hearst newspapers to jump to his defense and, though their efforts were only half-hearted, they were sufficient to quiet down any opposition to Curley within the camp.

During the varied years wrestling has boomed throughout the United States, Curley's promotions have lost huge sums of monies according to the statements he submitted to his partners after each match. No matter how large the houses, Curley could usually find expenditures to take up the profits.

These defalcations of funds were tolerated by the mat master minds because of the publicity value of favorable wrestling stories emanating from New York, mecca of all America.

Of course, Mr. Editor and Mr. Publisher in many cases have social climbing wives who are affiliated with some pet charity which furthers their own cause in social progress. Curley never hesitates to call upon these same wives for aid if some truthful scribe gets out of line.

Sizable contributions toward political clubs, charity shows to support some politically powerful leader's fresh air fund or off the street fund for children, with the wrestlers paying the freight and Curley getting the glory and credit, all add to Curley's power and ability to hold the wrestlers into line.

Minor favors he can secure and whenever title difficulties develop he exhibits a surprising talent for protecting any combination which is willing to kick in with an extra sum as a bonus.

During the depression wrestling hit the depths all over the country. At that it was still a profitable promotion for Mondt, Rudy Dusek, Ray Fabiani, Ed White, Paul Bowser, Tom Packs, Ed "Strangler" Lewis, and Lou Daro—except in the New York territory.

In the summer of 1936, "Strangler" Lewis, Rudy Dusek, Fabiani, Mondt and Curley, partners in the New York territory, were to meet at the Hotel Warwick in New York City to balance their books. When Curley called the meeting to order Dusek was missing, but the ever adroit Jack went on with the proceedings.

“Gentlemen,” he is supposed to have sadly said, “business has been terrible this year past. We lost fifty thousand dollars by my way of figuring.”

Just at this moment the tardy Rudy Dusek entered the room.

“Where were you?” asked Mondt.

“Shooting craps,” replied Rudy.

“Did you win?” asked Lewis.

“Three bucks,” answered Dusek.

Curley beamed.

“Thank goodness, gentlemen,” he cut in, “as our partner Rudy has just made three dollars, I can now report that our deficit this year will only total forty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven dollars.”

Chapter 15

The Greeks Had A Word For Him

During the years of ‘30, ‘31, and ‘32, the Londos star continued to shine brightly in the wrestling heavens. Londos drew immense houses throughout the United States. His popularity had hemmed in Paul Bowser and his Champion Henri De Glane to the New England territory, where Bowser’s politically powerful friends made it impossible for Londos to receive title recognition.

“Strangler” Lewis was in semi-retirement after his defeat by De Glane and the Mondt-Londos faction was almost unhampered in its Barnum promotions.

As the Londos wrestling gates swelled, the Little Greek’s head followed suit. He began believing the favorable publicity yarns which Mondt inspired.

It wasn’t until the summer of 1932 that Londos’ popularity began to wane. Mondt foresaw the public was tiring of the little Greek’s continual victories, night after night, with no risk of defeat, not even a draw decision marring his record.

Too, nearly every worthwhile wrestler in America, outside the Bowser group, had met and been defeated by the Greek pretender. “Toots” suggested Richard Shikat should have the title restored to him.

“It belongs to Dick by rights anyway,” Mondt argued. “He only lent it to you and if you give it back, Jim, we’ll keep up these big gates,” he urged.

Londos refused to meet Shikat.

Mondt suspected Londos of planning to break away from the combine and form bis own troupe. His suspicions were confirmed when Jack Pfeffer discovered, at the New York State Athletic Commission's Offices, while going through the contract files there, that Londos and White had filed an "EXCLUSIVE" managerial contract which designated solely White as being the manager of Champion Londos.

"Toots" realized there must be quick action to curb Londos' ambitions so he tried another scheme.

Being summer it was necessary for Jack Curley to stage his regular summer wrestling show for the Hearst Milk Fund. "Toots" plotted with Shikat and then suggested to Londos and his manager Ed White that Shikat meet Sammy Stein and after Stein beat Shikat, Londos would wrestle Stein for the Milk Fund.

"If we work this program we might be able to draw another big house at the Yankee Stadium as we did when you met Steele," "Toots" told Londos and White.

Both agreed to this program.

Then through the manipulation of the New York Commission and at the insistence of the Milk Fund, "just to steam up the Shikat and Stein bout," (as Mondt again told White and Londos) the New York State Athletic Commission ordered Londos to sign a contract with Jack Curley guaranteeing that he would meet the winner of the Shikat and Stein contest. Curley had no idea the Stein-Londos match would not take place; and went through with announcements.

Londos and White fell into the trap. Londos signed!

And Mondt chuckled, for he knew he had "Jim the jumper" bound hand and foot. Mondt, White and Londos journeyed to Chicago two days before

the Shikat and Stein contest was held. White and Londos received a shock when Shikat apparently double-crossed Mondt and threw Stein.

Londos and White tried to wriggle out of their signed contracts filed with the New York State Commission but the Empire State solons refused to budge. Londos had signed to meet the winner of a Shikat and Stein bout and inasmuch as Shikat had won, the Commission ruled Londos would have to go through with the bout.

Londos and White tried to change the plans through pleadings, cajolings, threats and flattery but "Toots" remained adamant.

"It's time the title changed hands anyway and Shikat will get it," Mondt told White and Londos.

"Well," decided Londos, "if that's the way you feel about it I'm going to leave the combination, Toots. I'm the champion in several states and I'm the big drawing card, too. I have plenty of money and I'll fight you until I put you out of business."

Londos and White took a walk and their exit launched one of the greatest "dog fights" ever witnessed in wrestling history.

'Toots" arose to the occasion, however.

In a wire from Chicago Londos had said to "Toots," "I'm through and what are you going to do about it?"

Mondt did plenty.

He flew by plane to Nekoosa, Wisconsin, where Ed "Strangler" Lewis, paunchy and half blind, was living in semi-retirement with his father. Mondt persuaded Lewis to forget old differences that had arisen when he had parted with Sandow and to come out of retirement and challenge Londos, whom Lewis had thrown more than fifteen times during the heyday of the Sandow-Mondt and Lewis gold rush era.

All was forgiven. Lewis was considered the ideal opponent to crusade in New York and Pennsylvania by virtue of his well-known wrestling ability and many victories over Londos. “After all,” reasoned Mondt, “Shikat had been beaten by Londos while Lewis held fifteen straight victories over the Greek claimant to the heavyweight wrestling title.”

Quoting Jack Pfeffer again:

In May, 1932, a new partnership was formed in New York with Jack Curley, “Toots” Mondt, Rudy Miller, “Strangler” Lewis, Dick Shikat and myself as partners. Londos had refused to meet Lewis for the title in a shooting match and as “Toots” Mondt had a 25 per cent interest in Londos’ title, which was valued at $200,000 at the time, we thought we ought to recompense him for breaking away from the Londos-White-Packs combination and staying with us.

So Miller put in $3,000. I posted the same amount, and Shikat and Lewis each put up $5,000, making a total of $16,000, which we gave Mondt as a bonus for giving up his interest in Londos and casting his lot with us.

Previous to that, when Londos and Shikat wrestled in Philadelphia, Mondt had an interest in each wrestler, being Shikat’s manager, besides owning 25 per cent of Londos. They called this a shooting match.

When the new combination staged its first match, June 10th, 1932, between Shikat and Lewis, this was supposed to be a shooting match too, but the money was split six equal ways with Shikat and Lewis, the supposed rivals, really business partners.

Shikat’s manager, “Toots” Mondt, received $20,000 as a guarantee that, after Shikat had allowed Lewis to throw him, he would get a return match in which he was to toss Lewis. Lewis didn’t have any ready cash so he signed over his $50,000 annuity policy to Mondt, who put up the money for him.

Lewis balked at coming back and flopping for Shikat. As Mondt had signed a five-year managerial contract with Lewis, “Toots” wasn’t anxious for the match either. Lewis wanted his money back, though, so a meeting was arranged with Shikat, Lewis and Mondt present. At this meeting, Shikat was told if he gave up the $20,000 and put up $12,000 more, he would be permitted to win the title from Lewis in a return bout and he put up the money readily, Mondt taking it from the pocket he used as Shikat’s manager and putting it into the pocket he reserved for Lewis’ finances.

Shikat never got the promised return bout for the title. He did meet Lewis in a one-hour time-limit match which went the limit and was called a draw. They tricked him into signing a dummy contract.

Shikat began to yelp for his money and a real chance at the title. Lewis and Mondt soothed the Teuton’s ruffled feelings by promising a return match for the title. The German quieted down and Lewis was matched with Jim Browning, the airplane legs scissors spinning heavyweight wrestling contender from Boston.

The match was staged in Madison Square Garden on February 21st, 1933, and Browning won. Lewis charged Browning with double crossing him. Shikat was all for breaking Browning’s neck. Mondt, too, was indignant.

Were they on the level? More again, quoting Mr. Pfeffer, who was a partner in the proceedings. This is what happened: “For losing the title, Lewis and Mondt received $42,000 in cash and bonds from Browning, and his manager, Paul Bowser, and Mondt went into partnership.”

Shikat suddenly saw the light of day and protested the double dealing. Mondt, Curley, Pfeffer and Lewis invited him to come to Mondt’s apartment in the Hotel Warwick for a conference. Shikat accepted the invitation.

During the discussion Shikat lost his head and called spades shovels and reflected unkindly upon both Lewis and Mondt and the way he had been

handled.

Lewis punched Shikat, and the German punched back. Then Mondt jumped into the fray and proceeded to give the German the trouncing of his wrestling life.

Shikat walked out, or rather, we should say, Dick staggered out, had his injuries, administered by Mondt, treated at the Polyclinic Hospital and allied with the Londos faction.

The wheel began going round.

Chapter 16

Police! Police! Police!

Washing the dirty wrestling linen in public via State Athletic Commissions and through friendly newspapers became the sport of both wrestling factions, the eastern combination headed by Mondt, and the Londos group, with Tom Packs of St. Louis and Ray Fabiani of Philadelphia supporting Londos.

The Londos group entered the New York field to buck Jack Curley, Mondt's promoter, and allied itself with Charlie and Willie Johnston.

Tom Packs later told this writer that this effort to break "Toots" in his own back yard cost Londos, Packs and Fabiani nearly fifty thousand dollars in round numbers, and still the little Greek wasn't making any real headway.

Rudy Dusek, well known to wrestlers as a matman and promoter through the south, was brought into the east to guide the Johnston brothers in their efforts to help Londos and to book the Johnston controlled clubs and arrange programs.

Meanwhile Mondt and his partners weren't asleep. They were staying up nights fighting Londos and his new cohorts.

Though the new combination was in control of wrestling in the eastern metropolitan area, Londos continued to hold sway in the hinterlands. Shorn of any championship claims in New York state, the states of Pennsylvania and Illinois, strangely enough, refused to heed the challenges of either Lewis or Browning and the Golden Greek reigned supreme with his crown barely tarnished.

Londos continued meeting the same matmen night after night and while the takings weren't as large as before, still the gates were satisfactory.

Lewis, Mondt, Pfeffer, Curley, Miller, and Bowser decided to do something about the Greek's popularity.

The old idea of double crossing Londos through one of his trusted lieutenants occurred to Mondt and his partners. New Haven was selected as the site and a third-rate wrestler named Pat O'Shocker was picked as the man to do the job. O'Shocker goes down in wrestling history as a man who refused to win a heavyweight wrestling championship.

In a signed and sworn story published in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat of April 11, 1933, Pat O'Shocker revealed that on the day of his arrival in New Haven (September 12th, 1932) he was taken to an apartment for a conference with "Toots" Mondt. O'Shocker said in the Globe-Democrat that Mondt offered him $15,000 and a contract which would make him rich if he crossed up Londos and won the bout. Pat turned it down. Then Mondt offered him $25,000. Again O'Shocker turned it down. Mondt said he was foolish, as the referee "was all right."

O'Shocker left the conference and went at once to Londos to tip him off that there was skulduggery at the junction.

Hearing of the plot, Londos announced he wouldn't go through with the bout. He didn't trust even the faithful O'Shocker, who had tipped him off. Connecticut Athletic Commissioner Tom Donohue told him if he didn't go through with the match his title would be declared forfeit. Londos then demanded that the referee be changed. Donohue refused and Londos had to go through with the so-called contest.

He threw O'Shocker in eighteen minutes and then he and Pat took it on the lam to avoid the angry fans, who wanted to lynch both of them.

"Toots" had evidently read the classics, for he believed in the old adage, "If once you don't succeed, try, try again." He awaited his opportunity to try again. It was important that Londos be discredited.

Pfeffer says:

Mondt saw another chance to get Londos. Joe Savoldi, who had been tossed numerous times by the Greek, was booked to meet him in Chicago on April 7, 1933, and "Toots" sent an emissary to sound out Joe on the proposition of giving Jimmie the works.

This time "Toots" had a wrestler who knew the meaning of the word cooperation. Everything was all set. "Toots" stole into Chicago (I hate to use the word steal in connection with the wrestling game) and registered under a nom de plume at the Palmer House. He kept under cover until the night of the bout. Then he had the extreme satisfaction of seeing Savoldi win the match from Londos.

The next day Mondt, Savoldi and Judge Bernard Barasa, of Chicago, were on their way to New York, Savoldi, with a contract from Mondt, signed before the Londos match, tucked away in his pocket. Savoldi boomed business for us. He and Lewis had a match that wound up with Joe jumping out of the ring and losing the decision.

To those in the know, this move in having Savoldi lose to Lewis was a necessary one. Londos had marshaled his political forces in Pennsylvania and Illinois and the Commissions in these states ordered a return match between Londos and Savoldi.

After his victory over Savoldi, Lewis promptly wired the commissions in Pennsylvania and Illinois that in view of the fact he had defeated Savoldi, who had won over Londos, he was willing to meet Londos "anywhere, any time, any place." This quieted Londos, who seemed strangely apathetic whenever Lewis was mentioned as an opponent.

Lewis and Mondt's next move was for Lewis to journey to Boston, where the "Strangler" lost to Ed Don George. The latter had just lately won back his claim to the heavyweight title by defeating Henri De Glane, he of the famous Montreal double-cross.

Inasmuch as Bowser and Lewis had repaired the political fences this maneuver of Lewis' in losing to George was considered a smart one. Even if Londos did decide to meet Lewis, the bird had flown, and any shreds to Londos' title claims now rested on the brow of Ed Don George.

To forestall Londos challenging George for a match anywhere but in Boston, where Bowser could protect him, George signed a contract with Bowser to defend his title in Boston against Londos. As Massachusetts had no commission governing wrestling, Bowser selects his own referees for all matches, and Londos could readily perceive the danger in signing to meet George in the Bean City. Lewis and Mondt had the Golden Greek blocked again, but he continued wrestling.

Ray Fabiani, of Philadelphia, managed to keep the Pennsylvania Commission in line and that august body refused to recognize either Browning, George, or Savoldi as title claimants. Londos was still kingpin of the mat world—in Pennsylvania at least. Packs' political friends kept the Missouri State Commission faithful to Londos also, so the Greek maintained shreds of his popularity.

Now to get back to Savoldi. Mondt, Pfeffer, Miller, Lewis, and Curley wanted to build up Joe Savoldi as an opponent for Jim Browning in order to stage a big open air match for the benefit of the Hearst Milk Fund. After losing to George, Lewis came back into Madison Square Garden and was pinned by Savoldi.

Ring around the rosy.

Mondt's eastern combination planned to stage a Savoldi and Browning Championship match in the open air for the redoubtable Hearst Milk Fund. Rudy Dusek decided to do a little double crossing on his own hook. Like

Mondt, he found a matman within the new eastern combination's own ranks who was willing to talk business.

He was Sol Slagel of Nebraska, a half-starved grappler whom Jack Pfeffer had been brow beating. Slagel also harbored an obscure grudge against Savoldi for some slighting remark the latter had once made concerning his (Slagel's) ability. He made an easy subject for Dusek to work on.

Therefore, in June of 1933 at the Coast Guard Station in Staten Island, New York, Sol Slagel climbed into the ring to throw Savoldi and thus spoil any possible gate which might be in the offing when Browning and Savoldi met for the title. While Slagel succeeded in his part of the bargain, the wily "Toots" had protected his wrestler sufficiently enough by having one Captain Barry Peschmaylen, front man for Mondt, in the ring as referee.

Slagel threw Savoldi not once but ten times with Peschmaylen finally disqualifying Slagel on a supposed foul and awarding the victory to Savoldi.

When the partisan referee took this step riots broke out throughout the club and only the prompt work on the part of coast guardsmen prevented serious injuries to scrappy spectators and wrestlers alike.

The newspapers carried the stories of Savoldi's ignominious rout and the Browning-Savoldi gate receipts were definitely lessened.

The voluble Mr. Pfeffer states:

"When Savoldi and Browning met in an open air match it was raining so hard the crowd was almost invisible, so the boys wrestled two hours without a fall, Browning getting the decision, and they didn't get a cent for their services."

While Londos wasn't making his former big money, he was keeping Mondt and his supporters from getting any profits.

The fight entered another stage—that of intrigue.

Chapter 17

Love's Old Sweet Song

The ways of the “heathen Chinee” may be dark and devious but the schemes of wrestling manipulators are indeed beyond reckoning.

“Jeemy” Londos and his henchmen began rearranging their forces to smash Mondt and his partners. They couldn’t do it by straight wrestling and mat promotion so they aimed at the eastern combination’s pocketbook. Politics may make strange bedfellows everywhere except in wrestling.

Londos might never have reached second base in his efforts to buck Mondt if an unfortunate automobile accident hadn’t taken most of “Toots’” time. It occurred in Toronto, Canada, where “Toots,” while driving to his hotel, in his own car, hit a machine, the collision killing the occupants in the other auto. Mondt was tried in the Canadian courts on a manslaughter charge and had to take time out in addition to fight several damage suits. By the time he was adjudged blameless, he had spent about $300,000.

Knowing that Jack Pfeffer was the financial emir behind Mondt, Bowser, Lewis and Curley, the “Golden Greek’s” backers began wooing the little Litvak.

Londos, master con man and two-faced charlatan, conducted secret conferences with the messy Hebrew who was furnishing the bankroll for his partners to combat Londos at every turn.

Beneath Pfeffer’s dirty shirt burned the fires of ambition. He wanted to be the number one man in the New York picture. He wanted to promote in Madison Square Garden and have the glory of those four-column half-tone cuts which New York newspapers so generously contributed to Jack Curley

whenever he ran a mat carnival either at Madison Square Garden or the 71st Regiment Armory.

Pfeffer refused to listen to Londos until he proved his good faith by dumping Rudy Dusek, the Greek eastern manipulator.

Londos, through Tom Packs and the Johnston brothers, found no difficulty in doing this. Londos merely waited until Dusek went to Omaha for a brief vacation and installed Bill Nelson, assistant hooker to Dusek in Rudy's place. When Dusek returned, he found the Londos wrestling headquarters moved to different rooms in the Hotel Lincoln and his personal effects in the hotel storeroom.

When Pfeffer was apprised of the changes Londos had made in the eastern booking offices in order to testify as to his good faith, the "Halitosis Kid" lent more attentive ear. Londos knew just how to play up Pfeffer's many-sided characteristics.

He pointed out that Pfeffer could come into his organization, be the big eastern manipulator, crack whip, and when Mondt and his cohorts were brought to their knees, Jack Curley would be thrown by the wayside and Pfeffer installed in his place as the Greek wrestler's official New York sponsor and promoter.

"We have had a long talk with Jimmy Johnston and President John Reed Kilpatrick of Madison Square Garden," Londos told Pfeffer. "Mr. Kilpatrick has assured me we will have the Garden in the fall for our wrestling promotions. I'll turn the Garden over to you and you can be the big man in New York City. Go along with the Johnston brothers for a time and after you are established as the big promoter here we'll throw out the Johnstons and you'll be top man."

Londos was plotting a double cross all around. Pfeffer was to play a traitor to Mondt, Curley and Lewis, and in turn Londos played heel with Dusek and the Johnston brothers.

Londos and his pals were playing the old wrestling game of ring around the rosy.

Pfeffer became a partner in the Londos organization and began booking his clubs, The Ridgewood Grove and Bronx Coliseum from the offices of Charley Johnston, Londos' eastern manager. Pfeffer says he and his partner, Rudy Miller (who also became afflicted with financial cold feet and had aligned himself with Pfeffer), each posted two thousand five hundred dollars with Londos as a guarantee of good faith on their part. Londos and his associates, of course, weren't required to show their faith by posting coin of the realm with Pfeffer.

Pfeffer's quick overnight jump from Mondt, Curley and Lewis to Londos and his supporters, stunned Mondt only temporarily. "Toots" sought out Rudy Dusek and sold him a partnership in his organization for twenty thousand dollars. What went with the partnership has always remained a somewhat hazy idea. A partnership seemed to include Dusek's privilege to call himself a partner and supply twenty thousand dollars to continue to fight Londos until such time as a better deal came along.

Dusek's contribution to the partnership, however, was Dusek, his brothers, Leon Baklin, a hooker, whom he won over from the Tom Packs group, and Sam Segal, southern promoter and booker.

As future events shaped themselves it developed that while Dusek paid twenty thousand dollars for a partnership, it was only an interest in Mondt's share of the business and did not include any financial claims Curley, Lewis and Bowser might have. It was probably one of the most stupid business arrangements any person, whether a wrestler or businessman, could make.

Though schooled in the ways of the wrestling double-cross Dusek smiled serenely and walked into the trap.

The blame for future events that occurred in the wrestling factions' double crossing of Pfeffer rests squarely on Pfeffer's own shoulders. He was by no means a novice in the grappling business and was well aware of

the larceny, deception, fraud, trickery and double crossers common to the so-called sport.

With Pfeffer and Miller's joint five thousand dollars bond resting in his pocket, Londos sailed for Greece to see his ailing father. White and Packs quietly began negotiating with Lewis, Mondt, Paul Bowser, Curley and Rudy Dusek. Here's how Pfeffer first got wind of the fact he was about to be forced out of wrestling. He says: "While Londos was in Greece I booked my clubs with the Londos group's wrestlers.

"I received no word from White or Packs and I began to grow suspicious. There had been reports in the New York Enquirer that there was to be a new deal in wrestling with the Londos and Curley factions deciding to make up.

"Right there, I knew that I was being double crossed. If I had any lingering doubts, they were dispelled when I heard Curley, Mondt, Bowser, Dusek, White, Packs and Londos had a peace meeting at the Pennsylvania Hotel. All members of both wrestling factions left me and Charley Johnston out in the cold and merged into one big happy family."

It was Londos himself who supplied the key to his reason for pushing Pfeffer out of the heavyweight mat picture.

Pfeffer sought several conferences with Londos and finally cornered him one morning at the Hotel St. Moritz.

"Listen to me you dirty little bum," Londos said to Pfeffer. "I'm even with you now and you're out in the cold. I said to myself I was going to get even with you that night in the Hotel Paramount, when we were discussing a match with Shikat and you called me yellow. You got away with it then, but now you're out of the wrestling business. You supplied the money for the Joe Savoldi double cross in Chicago, now go out and see how far you can get. I'll see you broke yet, and in the breadline."

“Ya, ya, you big bummer,” shouted Jack. “Yat hall drink your blood, you lousy Grik bum.”

“Start drinking,” replied Londos, “but get out of my room. The new combination is going to make money.”

Chapter 18

Happee New Year

The year of 1934 dawned throughout the United States as a happy one, indeed, for the new main combination. While Jack Pfeffer and the Johnston brothers fumed and ranted in their tents, and their club became empty, and the principal matmen withdrew to other territories or went over to the Jack Curley offices in the Fitzgerald Building for bookings, Jack Curley, Ray Fabiani, Tom Packs, Ed White, Paul Bowser and "Toots" Mondt got together and signed articles which extended the scope of activities from coast to coast and gave to the combination a bigger field of activity.

During a Federal Court trial in Columbus, Ohio, on Friday, April 1st, 1936 (which we shall touch upon in more detail later), it was shown that the aforementioned partners signed a partnership agreement at the time of the new merger-which virtually gave the group a strangle hold upon the wrestling game in the United States and Canada.

Inasmuch as Mondt and his partners at once set about an interchange of talent with Henri De Glane in Paris, Atholl Oakley in England, and Earl McCready in Australia, it can be deduced that the new mat trust had a headlock on the sport throughout the world. For without wrestlers, a promoter cannot run, and Mondt and partners had the talent.

However, Londos was not one to rest upon mere contracts. While his name was not affixed to the partnership contract, yet he was very much in the wrestling picture when the merger came about. Chicago's Ed White acted as Jimmy's inner operative, Londos sensing that his future wrestling reputation might be jeopardized, should he make the mistake of signing an agreement which might later fall into unfriendly hands.

He, however, did obtain a cash deposit of fifty thousand dollars, contributed jointly by Mondt, Fabiani, Packs, Bowser, Dusek, and Lewis, that he would not lose any matches while he wrestled under the new combine's aegis, or if he should lose, the fifty thousand dollars would be declared forfeit.

The object of this cash bond was threefold. It gave Londos a chunk of money to hold as a guarantee of faith. It guaranteed Londos protection in case of a double cross on the part of any or all of the partners, and it kept the partners from becoming unmanageable.

Mr. Pfeffer waxed indignant when the new group formed and left him out in the cold, and he repaired at once to Dan Parker, New York Daily Mirror sports editor, into whose ear he poured out his story of the mat trust machinations, at the same time calling attention to the fact that he, too, was no lily white and had participated in the money grab during the Londos era of big gates.

"Them thiefs is stealin' and onless dey make me ha partner, den I won't play. I vant to steal vatches too if dem guys are goin' to rob the jewelry shop," Pfeffer shouted.

Quoting the loquacious M. Pfeffer again:

"Londos trusts no one and has $50,000 in his pocket as a forfeit from his recent enemies, in case they cross him up and let one of their group throw him.

"Londos will not wrestle anyone in a shooting match. Under the new agreement he will retain his title until they give him enough money to make it worthwhile losing."

The new trust partners not only snickered but guffawed aloud while Pfeffer shrieked his charges of double dealing and cold decking on the part of the mat trust. Pfeffer exposed the Londos era of fakery, but the trust shrugged its shoulders.

“We’re so strong now nothing can stop us from making money,” Ed White said.

It’s always fair weather when good fellows get together, and the new wrestling trust, greater in numbers, finances and talent than the trust once controlled by the mighty Sandow, began making programs as rapidly as possible.

With every important heavyweight wrestler under the new trust’s thumb, Pfeffer realized that not only were his clubs expensive burdens, but he was also in the position of standing on the outside looking in while juicy profits poured into the coffers of his enemies.

In the parlance of gangdom, Pfeffer became a copper and blew his whistle. In written letters and statements to newspapers he revealed the inside workings of the wrestling business.

The august New York State Athletic Commission, seemingly unaware until then of the vast manipulations in the wrestling industry, ordered a probe of Pfeffer’s allegations.

Packs, White, Miller, Londos, Fabiani, Shikat, Pfeffer, Lewis, Curley, Bowser, Browning and Mondt were ordered to appear at a Commission meeting to answer several questions. Pfeffer arrived with his lawyer, Jeremiah O’Leary. Commissioners Brown and Phelan conducted the probe for the State Athletic Commission.

The investigation had hardly gotten under way before it was apparent to Counselor O’Leary that the new trust’s tacticians had again outsmarted Pfeffer. Rudy Miller was introduced as a surprise witness for the trust. Also an affidavit from Miller was placed in evidence in which the trust received a whitewashing.

Miller had double crossed Pfeffer by jumping back to his former partners’ side of the fence. Attorney O’Leary began questioning Miller. It

soon became apparent the latter's testimony was at variance with the whitewashing in his affidavit.

At this point in the proceedings, Commissioners Brown and Phelan ordered a recess to consider evidence. And that was the last ever heard about the great wrestling probe.

Chapter 19

It Takes a Thief to Catch a Thief

It's an old maxim in law enforcement that “It takes a thief to catch a thief,” and Pfeffer soon demonstrated that he was an apt proof of the time-worn motto.

His wrestling exposes in various New York papers were wired into every major town in the United States, and he himself mailed thousands of copies to every sports editor in the United States and Canada.

Even friendly sport scribes were constrained to proceed cautiously in their support of wrestling attractions promoted in their towns when they read of the previous hoodwinkings they and their readers had received.

Pfeffer and the Johnston brothers allied themselves with Al Haft of Columbus, Ohio, who was featuring middleweight, lightweight and welterweight grapplers.

The midget matmen had always been shunned by the trust, so were available for bouts in metropolitan clubs, and only too happy for the opportunity to work. They flocked to the Johnston-Pfeffer banners and soon proved almost as popular as the mastodons.

Three heavyweights, however, continued to hold sway as champions. Though the members had signed a trust agreement, Bowser held onto Browning and George as titleholders, while Londos continued to claim a crown even though Savoldi had defeated him the year before in Chicago.

On June 24, 1934, Londos reestablished himself as champion in New York by throwing Jim Browning in the Madison Square Garden Bowl, in a

contest for the benefit of the Hearst Milk Fund. The bout drew a gate of nearly forty thousand dollars.

The day before the Londos-Browning "contest," the New York Enquirer printed a story in which it revealed that Londos was holding $50,000 as a guarantee he would throw Browning. The Enquirer also exposed the conditions surrounding the "contest," together with the time scheduled for the "contest" to end, and who the victor would be. Nevertheless, the "unsuspecting" members of the New York State Athletic Commission sanctioned the contest as a "shooting" match.

This, despite the fact all involved, according to Pfeffer's testimony, Packs, Londos, Bowser, White, Curley, Fabiani, Dusek, Lewis, Mondt and Miller were partners in the business.

The trust partners also assuaged Londos' feelings somewhat, in the Fall of 1934, by permitting the little Greek Hercules to defeat Ed "Strangler" Lewis, his ancient enemy (and then business partner), in another of those advertised "SHOOTING" matches at Wrigley Field in Chicago. The bout took place on Sept. 20, 1934, with a gross gate of $96,000.

The Chicago Tribune was used as the prop to pry the money from the gullible fans and The Tribune sponsored the Londos-Lewis "Contest." All the trust partners joyfully attended the bout in festive spirits and happily cut up the melon afterwards.

Any doubts concerning the competitive angle in wrestling are dispelled by reading an excerpt from an article in Nat Fleischer's Ring Magazine, dated October, 1934. It says:

Regardless of any pre-arrangement—and the boxing commission must be aware that such agreements are made in all championship and other exhibitions—there can be no kick by the fans because they know what to expect and get what they come to see—good entertainment. That's all wrestling is, nowadays. Legitimate competition is gone. The days of real, honest-to-goodness wrestling matches are things of the past, and we all

might just as well get accustomed to the other type, because it is the only kind we can see in these days of commercialized sport.

The Londos-Lewis match in Chicago was the last big house the trust partners were to share in for some months to come, however. Wily Jack Pfeffer was doing his work well. Profits from the midget matmen he sponsored were of secondary consideration. Revenge was sweet and he literally "drank" Londos and his partners' blood on many a festive occasion.

Through the years, Pfeffer had kept a complete account of every wrestler's record, and as fast as the combination's master minds revealed plans for a new bout in one of the metropolitan centers, Jack would reveal to the sports editors that it had been done before.

Perhaps the most notable case was the evening of November 19, 1934, when Jim Londos was paired to defend his title against Everett Marshall.

Billy Sandow was sponsoring Marshall, but he conveniently forgot that his man had met and been defeated by Londos on several previous occasions. Pfeffer went to the New York Daily News with alleged records of the number of times Londos and Marshall had met.

The day of the bout dawned bright and clear, with the various trust partners on hand early to count the line at the box office. They were due for a rude awakening, for the Daily News, with the largest daily newspaper circulation in America, carried a graphic feature sports story headed:

LONDOS AND MARSHALL MEET AT GARDEN TONIGHT FOR THE 26TH TIME. SCORE—LONDOS 26, MARSHALL 0.

The fans read, and Curley, Mondt and the rest of the partners wept. That evening the principals wrestled before a virtual gallery of ghosts.

Pfeffer was doing his work well, and the fans were beginning to catch on to the way mat contests were arranged.

The clouds gathered and became blacker on the mat horizon.

What had been a honeymoon in January for the mat moguls, threatened to become a divorce in December of the same year.

Then factional disputes developed, and Mondt walked out of the Curley office in New York and began booking and promoting in partnership with Lou Daro of Los Angeles, leaving the eastern section of the United States to Rudy Dusek.

Jack Curley was doing his best to drive Dusek from the office, and Dusek, in turn, was feuding and trying to even old scores with Ray Fabiani.

The mat houses had fallen away to virtually nothing, when the savior came in the person of “DANNO ME BYE.”

Chapter 20

Wearing Out the Green

Danno O'Mahoney or “Danno Me Bye,” as Worcester’s Jack McGrath called him, came from Balleydhob, a whistle stop in the south of Ireland. Only the most fortuitous circumstances brought him into the American wrestling game.

Bowser had commissioned Jack McGrath to travel to Erin’s Isle, and there endeavor to persuade Doctor Patrick O’Callahan, Erin’s representative in the Olympics, to forsake medicine and to cast his lot with the American pachyderms.

“We have a big Irish population, not only in Boston and New England, but throughout the Americas,” Bowser told his partners. “The biggest drawing cards in American athletics have always had Irish names. If we can get O’Callahan and make him champion, we may have the Londos houses restored.”

So off to Dublin journeyed McGrath, only to have his overtures to O’Callahan met by rebuffs. The good doctor possessed enough money so that he needed not American shekels and made it plain to McGrath the best move he could make would be to return to the States on the next ship.

Considerably downcast, McGrath repaired to a tavern where he assuaged his thirst and wept copiously in the “arf and arf.”

He had become pleasantly immersed in his cups when his reverie was disturbed by a loud shouting outside the tavern door. Possessing all the curiosity of a Boston born Celt, McGrath rested his stein on the bar long

enough to permit him to poke his head through the inn door and view the scene without.

He saw a raw boned Irish lad clothed in the uniform of the Free State Army, well over six feet, and weighing in the neighborhood of two hundred pounds, putting the shot, the while admiring Gaels cooed and aahed every effort.

McGrath turned to the bartender, who was also viewing the lad's exhibition of prowess. "And who," he asked, "is that lad?"

The barkeep smiled joyfully, raised his eyes piously to heaven and answered: "That is 'Danno Me Bye.' The best shot putter in the Irish Free State Army."

"Is he married?" asked McGrath.

"That he is not," replied the booze dispenser.

"Do you know him?" was McGrath's next question.

"And that I do," answered the Celt, "fir isn't he my own sister's child by her marriage?" It was enough for McGrath. He sought an introduction to the athletic hero and before the day was over, Danno O'Mahoney had agreed to obtain a furlough from the Free State Army and try his hand in America as a bonecrusher.

"Though I've had no experience wrestling, I think the remuneration is sufficient to be interesting," Danno told his intimate friends. "I'm now receiving fifteen dollars monthly in the Free State Army. This man McGrath says I'll make a fortune in America, and if I do as I'm told, I'll be able to win the championship."

With only a rudimentary knowledge of wrestling, such as he had obtained in the Free State Army, Danno was taken to London, and there in a ring at Albert Hall, in December of 1934, met "Strangler" Lewis. "Big Ed"

had agreed to the match without first viewing his opponent. In fact, he stepped right off the gangplank and into Albert Hall, without waiting for his sea legs to wear off. He was treated to the most amazing sight of his career.

"I expected to see a Hercules," Lewis said later. "But when this fellow slouched into the ring and onto the mat, I was afraid to clamp a hold onto him for fear every bone in his body would crack. He swayed like a reed bent before a tornado. I had intended to wrestle a draw with him, but instead I threw him after twenty minutes of tugging. I just couldn't carry him through to a draw, he was so terrible looking."

McGrath was satisfied with the aptitude Danno had shown in his bout with Lewis, and early in 1935 the Irishman was launched upon his American bonecrushing career. He caught on at once in Boston.

Bowser and his partners fed him the best "workers," and the Irish-American public, with another hero to worship from afar, such as John L. Sullivan, Jimmy McLarnin and Roy Neal, flocked to the wrestling clubs where he appeared.

Almost at once, after Danno's Boston debut, the wrestling gates soared back to the oldtime highs that had been Bowser's pleasure when Sonnenberg was champion.

Rudy Dusek, his brothers, Ernie, Joe, Emil, Scotty MacDougall, Ray Steele, Jim Browning, "Strangler" Lewis, Sonnenberg, McMillen, Little Wolf, Joe Beaver, George Zaharias, they and many more worked with and lost to "Danno Me Bye" before huge houses.

There seemed to be no stopping "The Wild Irish Rose." Crowds followed him through New England and Canadian towns. Against Londos in Boston, on June 27th of 1935, he drew a record house of nearly seventy-five thousand dollars, and won Londos' claim to the championship, a feat which cost Bowser seventy-five thousand dollars, for he had to guarantee Londos not only the fifty thousand dollars which he and his partners had posted as a guarantee of faith, but the Greek pretender demanded another

twenty thousand before he would let his claim to the title change hands. Ed Don George then fell before the Irishman on July 27th, 1935, with heavyweight champion Jim Braddock acting as referee, and proving sufficiently adept at the art of being arbiter to enable Bowser to rematch George and Danno several times in various cities.

With Danno the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, the mat moguls looked for bigga and betta wrestling gates, but their hopes were dashed with cold water.

Danno had no sooner won the title than new trust busters appeared upon the horizon. Jack McGrath, who traveled with the Irishman and fronted as his manager, spent worrisome nights foiling efforts to double cross the Celt and grab his crown.

It had been years—not since "Strangler" Lewis had been in his heyday—since there had been a single undisputed title holder, and Billy Sandow, back in the picture with Everett Marshall, was challenging the Celt crown-wearer in every major city of America.

With the seventy thousand dollars invested in a title holder, Bowser needed protection aplenty and the job of covering up for Danno became a costly one.

There were rumors that Serge Kalmikoff, bewhiskered Russian importee, was going to double cross the trust and throw Danno during a Philadelphia bout. Only the prompt work of "Toots" Mondt foiled this scheme.

Out in Chicago, on the windy shores of Lake Michigan, Ed White eyed Danno's crown with covetous eyes, realizing that if one of his men defeated the Irishman, White would be back in the driver's seat.

On the Pacific Coast, where "Toots" Mondt was drawing record grappling gates with Man Mountain Dean, Vincent Lopez, Dean Detton, and Little Wolf, Mondt foresaw the possibilities of Danno being "hooked"

and had Vincent Lopez, Utah-Mexican-American, declared champion by the California Commission. When his partners protested this move, Mondt answered: “You can never tell when the Irishman is going to get clipped. Londos and Ed White are working to double cross him. The Greek got the seventy thousand dollars, and would now like to get the title back again, but he’s not going to pay for it. He’ll wait until he can trap Danno with some stooge.”

The partners learned later how correct “Toots” was to be in his deductions.

Sandow allied himself with Al Haft of Columbus, and Everett Marshall continued baiting Danno. Ed “Strangler” Lewis was shoved into the breach wherever a policeman was necessary, but even the redoubtable Lewis couldn’t be with Danno every night to protect him.

When, in the early part of 1936, Danno toured through the South, he narrowly averted two defeats, one by “Toots” Bashara in New Orleans in February, and the other by Ed Civil, known as “Daniel Boone Savage,” the “Wild Man” in Houston.

The works were in again for “Danno Me Bye” in Galveston, with Juan Hemberto as his opponent, but the prompt work of Charlie Rentropt, Memphis promoter, who was traveling with Danno and McGrath, as referee, prevented the Irishman from being hooked.

Rentropt adopted the expedient of having O’Mahoney show up in Galveston on the night of the contest and report that he was too ill to wrestle.

The fight over such a synthetic bauble as a mat crown may seem small potatoes to the reader, but to wrestling promoters the possession of the heavyweight title puts the manipulator in the driving seat. No sooner had Danno won the crown, than every small time promoter began figuring ways and means to outsmart Bowser and grab the title without paying for the privilege of owning a championship.

“Doctor” Karl Sarpolis, veteran grappler, made desperate and vain attempts to have the Texas Commission reverse the Houston decision of Referee Paul Jones (a Bowser-controlled wrestler who grappled with Danno many times) given in favor of the Irishman and have Ed Civil, so-called Wild Man, declared champion.

Sarpolis is said to have offered various officials and politicians twenty-five thousand dollars to change the decision and have Civil declared champion, but to the credit of the Lone Star State satraps it must be said that his offers met with refusal.

It has been said since, that these attempts to “hook” Danno during his southern tour were the direct results of Jim Londos’ undercover plotting, but later developments led many to suspect Rudy Dusek.

Before hooking up with the eastern wrestling picture, Dusek had been the big time mat master mind through the South. His chief lieutenant was Leon Balkin, brother-in-law to Shreveport, La., promoter, Julius Siegel, and Houston promoter, Morris Siegel.

On the night when Referee Paul Jones had protected Danno against the Ed Civil double cross, Sarpolis, who had not as yet shown his hand, Jack McGrath, Rentrop, Danno and Jones, held a conference in a room at the Auditorium Hotel in Houston. McGrath suggested that Siegel phone New York and relay news of the various happenings to Leon Balkin. According to later reports, the following conversation took place in substance:

Siegel: “Hello, Leon, is there anyone with you in your room?”

Evidently Siegel received a negative reply, for Siegel said: “I have a room full of people here, so I’ll tell you the news in Yiddish.”

Thereupon, Siegel conducted a twenty-minute phone conversation with his brother-in-law in Jewish.

Said McGrath later in reporting to Paul Bowser.

“We were all Christians in the room except Siegel. None of us but Siegel knew Jewish. We all knew, however, about the attempted double cross, and none of us suspected any of those present at the time. Now what need was there for Siegel to talk to Balkin over the long distance phone in Yiddish, unless Balkin was in on the plot?”

While Bowser did not have an immediate answer to this riddle, it came much later.

Danno returned from his southern tour considerably sullied, but still champion. The bombshell burst in the wrestling business on the night of March 2, 1936, in Madison Square Garden.

Richard Shikat, taciturn Teuton, sauntered into the Garden Ring, and in a bout sanctioned by the New York State Athletic Commission as a title match, he made O’Mahoney quit with a simple arm and double wristlock, easiest of holds for an experienced wrestler to break.

When Referee George Bothner patted Shikat on the back in token of victory, his gesture precipitated the opening of a wrestling war which may not end for years to come.

Beating O’Mahoney in the Madison Square Garden ring was a master stroke on Shikat’s part. With every big wire service covering Madison Square Garden events, Shikat knew he was in a position to secure world wide publicity. He knew, too, that although Ed Lewis, Jack Curley, McGrath, and other partners were on hand, George Bothner was a referee who would call the bout the way he saw it.

Within a few weeks there were to be more crosses in the wrestling business than one could find in the soldiers’ graveyards of France.

Chapter 21

Dog Fight

Danno at least proved to be a wise young man, possessed of something else besides brawn and no brains.

As the news scribes flocked into his dressing room after the epochal Shikat double cross, the Irishman was ready for them.

"I didn't quit," he told the Fourth Estaters. "I've been in more punishing holds. I was tired, though, because of my long three-hour match last Friday night in Boston with Yvon Robert, so I couldn't do my best. When Shikat clamped the arm lock on me I went to the floor.

"Shikat then told Referee Bothner he would break my arm unless he stopped the match. Bothner asked me if I wanted him to halt the contest, and I said: 'Don't halt the bout.' Well I guess Bothner misunderstood my brogue, for he then slapped Shikat on the back, as a sign he was the winner and pulled the German off of me.

"Bothner told me in the ring after the bout was over, that he thought I said 'Halt the bout.' Shikat is a good man and I hope to meet him again with a referee in the ring who can understand an Irish accent."

While Danno was declared shorn of his laurels by the New York State Commission, his brogue alibi served to save some vestige of his prestige.

The story behind Danno's defeat in itself far outfigures the plots of master fictionists.

Months before the Danno double cross, Shikat, inspired by a disgruntled member of the trust, announced his intention of returning to Nazi land, but before doing so, contacted fellow countryman Rudy Miller, Florida wrestling agent for the nationwide combination.

Miller came to New York and the tough Teuton vowed vengeance on the entire mat industry, and declared that upon his return from the Fatherland, he (Shikat) intended to await an opportunity to beat Danno O'Mahoney right in Madison Square Garden.

Miller acted fast. Al Haft, Columbus, Ohio, promoter, Detroit promoter Adam Weismuller, and onetime Mat Czar Billy Sandow, were apprised of Shikat's intentions. They signified their willingness to talk business with Shikat after he beat Champion O'Mahoney.

Late in the fall of 1935, Shikat returned from Germany, and was pointed for the title match with O'Mahoney which culminated in the epochal March 2, 1936, Madison Square Garden double cross. Shikat was now in a position to even old scores with Joe "Toots" Mondt, Jack Curley, "Strangler" Lewis, Jimmy Londos and Ed White. Too, he was in the driver's seat, and could erase some grudges Rudy Dusek, his sponsor, harbored against various parties. The gears in the well-oiled double cross began to grind slowly but surely, while other unsuspecting mat trusters remained in the dark. After winning his claim to the mat championship, the trust tried to talk business with Shikat. That worthy listened, but, prompted by his sponsor, Miller, decided to cast his lot with Haft and Sandow.

Shikat tried to interest Jack Pfeffer in the deal, but the wily leaping Litvak trusted Teutons, wrestling promoters, and grapplers as much as Al Capone trusts a cop, and refused to pool money in the deal, agreeing, however, to book Shikat in New York and protect him to the best of his ability. Which was like guaranteeing a baby that a Jack Dempsey wallop would not hurt him.

Surprisingly enough, it comes to light at this late date, that Shikat merely beat Danno to the gun in taking his title away. For out in the

Midwest the Sandow-Haft group had already made a deal with O'Mahoney, to have him leave New York right after the Shikat bout and accept a bout in Detroit with Everett Marshall, which the latter would win. The terms of the deal are said to have been arranged by a New York newspaperman on one of the Irish-American newspapers, and only Shikat's getting in ahead of Marshall prevented the plan from materializing.

Immediately after hearing of Danno's defeat, Mondt took a transcontinental plane to New York, and by tying up the loose ends he was able to figure out the key man in the double cross. It took him time, and while Mondt worked like one of Edgar Hoover's G-Men, Shikat was parading the country as champion.

Mondt made Shikat an offer to meet Vincent Lopez in Los Angeles, and agreed to post fifty thousand dollars as a guarantee for two bouts.

Shikat was holding out for the highest bidder. With the money of Haft and Sandow in his safety deposit box, he had decided to carry the double cross a little further, and double cross everyone.

As Shikat told this writer:

"My title is on the auction block. I'm going to get as much for it as possible. After the Browning match in Madison Square Garden, when I protested against Lewis losing the title to Browning without taking me in on the deal, Lewis and Mondt invited me up to the Warwick to talk it over, and instead, they beat me up. I waited a long time for revenge. I could have beaten Londos in Madison Square Garden on December 11th, 1934, after the big trust deal had been made with him and he was holding the fifty thousand dollars, and I was going to do so until I began wrestling with Londos in the Garden ring and sensed that this was just what Londos wanted so he could file his claim to the fifty thousand dollars and leave the country. "I decided right then and there to lose to Londos as programmed, and wait until later for revenge. I hated Londos as much as I hated Curley, Lewis, Mondt, Fabiani and Bowser, but I didn't want to make Londos richer

by double crossing the heels who had been in on the beating I took at the Warwick."

"Why?" this writer asked of Shikat, "didn't you come back and work with Mondt when you won the title back from Danno?"

"I was all ready to go back to Mondt or Bowser, because I felt they were the squares of the bunch, but I heard they planned to give me twenty-five thousand dollars for a return bout in Boston with Danno, and all agreed to this, but Lewis said: 'Sure, we'll promise him the twenty-five thousand dollars until after he loses to Danno, and then we'll take him up to a hotel room and give him another beating," responded Shikat. "So," concluded Shikat, "those fellows should watch my smoke now. I'm on my own."

Chapter 22

Smoke Got in Their Eyes

Jack Pfeffer gloated in his new-found glory of parading Richard Shikat around the newspaper offices as the man who broke the nationwide wrestling trust.

He found the champ a willing sporting stooge in his campaign to blow the whistle on the machinations of the bonecrushing industry.

Though extremely ignorant as to the background and motivation in wrestling, sports scribe Dan Parker managed to maintain a certain note of authority in his columnistic revelations because of Pfeffer's willingness to supply information with just a modicum of truth in every statement he gave the New York Mirror's reporter.

Too, Dan Parker had another source of confidential information in "Chick" Wergeles, master of espionage, who, while working for the Curley office as a press agent, garnered gossipy tidbits concerning the inside of the wrestling business and relayed them to Parker, who printed the information in his column.

Failing in their efforts to do business with Richard Shikat, the mat trust dug up a managerial contract held by Joe Alvarez, Boston matchmaker for Bowser, and sued in the Federal district court of Columbus, Ohio, to restrain Shikat from wrestling for the Haft-Sandow-Weismuller combine.

Ray Fabiani, Joe Alvarez, Leon Balkin and Jack Curley journeyed to Columbus for the legal joust.

On Friday, April 23, 1936, the Columbus Citizen, in recounting the various moves in the Federal trial to curb Shikat, said:

Wrestling is on the level.

Jack Curley, for 40 years one of the leading sport promoters of the country, swore to that today on the witness stand in Judge Mell Underwood's federal court, at the opening of the hearing of Joe Alvarez' request for an injunction against World's Champion Dick Shikat wrestling for anyone else but him.

Mr. Curley was the first witness offered by Attorney Fred C. Rector, acting for the plaintiff.

Mr. Curley had conveniently forgotten his revelations to Robert Edgren, New York World sports scribe, to whom he had revealed the various machinations of the wrestling business back in 1911, after the sorry Gotch-Hackenschmidt affair in Chicago.

Continuing, the Columbus Citizen said:

Just before noon recess, Attorneys Rector and John Connor for the defense engaged in a heated argument over admissibility of a photostatic copy of an agreement purported to be signed by Curley, Paul Bowser of Boston, Ray Fabiani of Philadelphia, Ed White of Chicago, Tom Packs of St. Louis and "Toots" Mondt of New York.

According to Mr. Connor, this copy, if admitted in evidence, will show the existence of a signed agreement between these men, splitting up the eastern half of the United States in a wrestling combine or trust.

Mr. Curley admitted on the stand that such an agreement existed, and vouched for his signature on the agreement.

Mr. Curley was called to the stand after Judge Underwood had dissolved the temporary restraining order, forbidding Mr. Shikat to appear

in any matches except for Mr. Alvarez.

The hearing then swung into a request for a permanent restraining order.

In response to a question from Mr. Rector, Mr. Curley said he had never participated in the fixing of a wrestling match, nor had he ever known of one being fixed.

Curley's testimony at this juncture, it might be pointed out, was in direct contradiction to Jack Pfeffer's various statements published in the New York Daily Mirror.

Quoting the Citizen again:

In the opening statements the two attorneys presented sharply contrasting pictures of the case.

To Mr. Rector it was merely a case of Mr. Shikat signing a contract with Joe Alvarez, and enjoying Mr. Alvarez' help and cooperation in getting to the top, and then deciding he'd no longer cut Mr. Alvarez in on the earnings.

To Mr. Connor it was a dramatic story of a German coming to this country as a stranger, and finding he had to ditch Rudy Miller, his original manager, and sign up with a manager named by the "trust" before he could get any matches.

Then, according to Mr. Connor, came days when the trust demanded that he put up a deposit of $18,000 with the so-called trust, to guarantee he'd follow instructions, even to the extent of losing when instructed to lose.

After following instructions, Mr. Connor said Mr. Shikat asked for the return of his $18,000 deposit, and the return was refused.

Then came instructions to sign with another manager, also in the combine, and a period of two years of trying to get the deposit back.

After that, according to Mr. Connor's opening statement, Mr. Shikat was signed to meet Danno O'Mahoney in New York City.

After the O'Mahoney match, according to Mr. Connor, representatives of the trust offered him his deposit back and $25,000 in addition, if he'd go in and meet Mr. O'Mahoney again and lose to him or to another wrestler named Robert.

Mr. Shikat, according to Mr. Connor, indignantly refused, and came west to join the stable of Al Haft, Columbus impresario of grunt and groan.

The Columbus State Journal said:

Charges that a wrestling "trust" exists in the eastern half of America, and that grapplers are forced to "win or lose or draw," according to order, or lose huge forfeits, whirled through federal court yesterday.

Indications were that the testimony would be completed Saturday, only two of more than a score of witnesses reaching the stand yesterday.

The two were Jack Curley, New York promoter, and Garrett L. Smalley of Kansas City, chairman of the Missouri State Athletic Commission.

In addition to Shikat and Haft, who is co-defendant in the suit, and friends of Haft and Curley, Ray Fabiani, Philadelphia promoter, was an interested spectator, and probably will be a witness when the hearing is resumed at 10 o'clock this morning.

The preliminary restraining order which stopped Shikat from appearing in any matches was dissolved by Judge Underwood at the morning session, after a brief exchange between John Connor, attorney for Shikat and Haft, and Fred Rector, counsel for Alvarez. As a result, Shikat may appear in any

match until the hearing is concluded, it is understood, and he is supposed to appear in Detroit tonight.

Smalley said he believed all contracts filed with the Missouri commission had borne Alvarez' name as manager. He said he had no documentary support, since all contracts are destroyed soon after matches.

Connor asked him who was paying his expenses to Columbus, and Smalley replied no one had paid them yet, but he expected Tom Packs of St. Louis would do so. Packs is a member of the wrestling "ring."

From Smalley's testimony it is only too evident to the reader as to which corner the Missouri State Athletic Commission was working in. Contracts destroyed, and a trust paying a public servant's expenses for favorable testimony. Truly a strange condition of affairs.

Quoting the Ohio State Journal again:

Jack Curley testified that he had known Alvarez for some years and that wrestling as it is conducted today in the United States, is strictly "on the level." He denied vigorously that he had asked Shikat to "take a dive" in his match with O'Mahoney, and also declared false an implied assertion that he had tried the same thing again in trying to induce Shikat to agree to a return match with the Irishman.

The eastern impresario of exhibitions and athletic shows seemed to resent Attorney Connor's revelation that his former name was Armand Jacob Schmul, which he changed 35 years ago in Chicago, to his present name.

Sports scribe Bob Beach of the Ohio State Journal, commented:

Lawyers must practice taking surprises without showing any shock. There is no doubt that the appearance in the court of a photostatic copy of the contract among Curley, Mondt, Bowser, Packs and Fabiani and White was like a bomb in the midst of the plaintiff's staff of attorneys. But Rector

didn't show it. Neither did his colleague, Mr. Sterling, Curley's Philadelphia lawyer. Curley himself, however, on the witness stand at the time, couldn't conceal a trace of amazement.

While Shikat was purportedly in the employ of Alvarez, and allegedly under "contract" to him, all the vouchers with which he was paid, which were introduced by the plaintiff, bore the signature of Curley.

Back to the court trial as again recounted in the Columbus Ohio State Journal:

After the O'Mahoney match, Connor said Shikat was called into Curley's office, where several members of the "ring" confronted him and asked him, "Why did you double cross us like you did last night?" But this also was denied by the witness.

Then the offer to Shikat for a return match, with the stipulation to "take a dive" was made, Connor said, but the title holder merely smiled and refused.

Curley said he had been engaged in the promotional game for years, and in response to his attorney's questions, said he included in his management, Annette Kellerman and the Vatican Choir "direct from Rome." He also said he had managed the tour of William Jennings Bryan in 1901-02.

He professed ignorance of most of the details of his promotional enterprises, asserting the details were left to his assistant, Leon Balkin. He admitted signature of checks to Shikat.

At the afternoon session the contract between Mondt, White, Curley, Packs, Bowser and Fabiani, and others, in which they agreed to split 60 percent of the proceeds of all their matches was introduced.

As Bowser, whom Shikat's attorney claims was the real manager and not Alvarez, was one of the signers, Curley admitted that he would

participate in the earnings of the champion, not only as a partner, but also as a promoter.

The wrestling trial was becoming heated and partisan, when on Friday, April 24, Lew Byrer, Sports Editor for the Columbus Citizen commented:

Mr. Curley affirmed and reaffirmed that he had no interest in the case other than seeing the right prevail.

He kept reaffirming even after admitting on the stand that he had signed the so-called trust contract along with Messrs. Bowser, Fabiani, Packs, Mondt and White.

Never did John Barrymore quiver a more disdainful nostril than did Mr. Curley in voicing his emphatic denial. Never did John's sister, Ethel, give a more vivid portrayal of righteous indignation.

One member of the mat trust spoke frankly, however, while the fireworks were going on in Columbus, Ohio. Tom Packs of St. Louis, in a statement given out to the National wire services, said:

"That a 'promoters' agreement' had been formed, but that it was junked after a 30-day trial.

"Promoters throughout the country," Packs said, "were trying to outbid each other for important matches. We found we were giving practically all of the profits to the wrestlers.

"We formed an association pooling profits and dividing equally. This agreement was not considered satisfactory by Curley, Bowser and Fabiani, so we decided to operate independently."

At least Packs was using his head and keeping it above water.

Chapter 23

Merry-Go-Round

Dracula was an angel, and King Kong was a sissy, compared with Richard Shikat, who schemed and connived as the attorneys for Haft, Sandow and Weismuller crossed swords with the legal batteries of the wrestling trust.

At this late date credit for the operations and maneuvers of the German are given to the late Mrs. Shikat, who was then constantly at the German's side and ready at all times to advise him as to the necessary moves in the chess game the Teuton was playing with the entire wrestling business.

The early part of the trial on April 24, 1936, was taken up with the unimportant testimony of Leon Balkin, agent for Rudy Dusek. Knowing the facts in the case, it is only too evident Dusek and Balkin were playing fast and loose with the men with whom they were supposed to be working.

Dusek had sent Balkin to Columbus to cover up and lull the unsuspecting partners, but his presence proved the last straw for Shikat.

Quoting the Columbus Dispatch:

Much of the time during the morning session was devoted to objections as Leon Balkin, snappily groomed booking agent for Jack Curley in New York, was on the witness stand.

Another time John Connor, attorney for the defendant, asked Balkin how many different towns he booked matches for, and who the promoters were.

“Sure,” replied Balkin, reaching into his pocket for a list. “I’ve got it right here. There are about 30 of them.”

Balkin then proceeded to read the list, but Connor stopped him indignantly, saying he didn’t intend to take the time of the court to read such a long list.

“Well,” Balkin replied indignantly, “you asked for it.” After Balkin left the stand, receipts received by Shikat, signed by “Toots” Mondt, New York associate of Curley, were placed among the exhibits, which brought a long series of bickering between counsel concerning Alvarez’ connection with Shikat as his manager.

The Shikat-versus-the-mat-trust case was dying of its own lack of steam on Friday morning, April 24, when Judge Mel Underwood opened court.

If interest was lagging, however, Mr. Shikat was going to supply a few little surprises on his own part. As the court opened, according to the Columbus Dispatch:

Counsel for Alvarez moved to reinstate the temporary order restraining Shikat from wrestling, but decision on this was reversed, thus permitting Shikat to go through with a scheduled bout in Detroit tonight against Ali Baba.

It was pointed out by those who decline to believe in lily white business tactics, that Shikat might lose his title to Ali Baba, thus scrapping the importance of the present case.

It is assumed by inference that Alvarez and his associates are interested principally in the title Shikat holds, rather than in Shikat himself.

Ah, how well the mat moguls knew the ways of a wrestler. What they anticipated happened. Shikat hurried to Detroit and there, on April 24, 1936, lost his title to Ali Baba, former U. S. Navy gob, named Harry Eskisian, who, by benefit of a close haircut, shave, and sun lamp treatments, had become a “Terrible Turk.”

With the title lost, the mat moguls let the trial go by default to Shikat.

Shortly thereafter, on May 5th, 1936, just to make it official, Shikat came into Madison Square Garden in New York where, under the promotional "genius" of the Johnston brothers and Jack Pfeffer, he again lost to Ali Baba. Only twenty-five hundred people witnessed the New York bout, but Haft, Pfeffer, Weismuller, the Johnston brothers and Sandow were satisfied that they had established Ali Baba's New York State claim to the heavyweight crown.

A few days after losing a second time to Ali Baba, Shikat returned to Germany with the body of his wife, who had been killed just a day after the New York bout with Ali Baba, in an automobile accident in Columbus, Ohio.

"Toots" Mondt came to the rescue again.

Figuring the next step in the Haft, Weismuller, Sandow and Pfeffer move would be to match Ali Baba with Everett Marshall, and thus put Sandow back in the driver's seat with the heavyweight title, Mondt began making overtures to all parties, at the same time Ray Fabiani, Tom Packs, and Rudy Dusek were trying to make connections with the new title czars.

Pfeffer finally became imbued with the idea that Haft, Sandow and Weismuller were going to double-cross him and work with his old enemies again.

"If enybuddy got to woik wit the trost hi vant hit should be Pfeffer," the little Litvak told Charlie Johnston. "Ve vill see 'Toots' Mondt and mak a double-cross of Sandow, Haft and Weismuller."

Pfeffer found a willing listener in Mondt.

In the early part of June, 1936, Mondt sneaked quietly into New York and after a forty-eight-hour conversation with Pfeffer at the Hotel Warwick,

Dave Levin, an ex-butcher boy from Jamaica, New York, was selected as the instrument to be used in the defeat of Ali Baba, the Sandow, Haft and Weismuller champion.

Levin was originally supposed to steal the title from Ali Baba during a bout at the Dyckman Oval in upper Harlem, but when the show was rained out, the match was held in Newark the following night, June 12, 1936.

A well timed kick in the groin, with Levin on the receiving end, and the title returned to Mondt, when referee Frank Sinborn disqualified Ali Baba, and awarded Levin the title on a foul, and proclaimed him "World Champion."

Like the "Star Spangled Banner," the bombs began bursting in air, on June 13th, for the sports world soon learned that Mondt had become manager of Levin. According to reports, Mondt paid Pfeffer $17,000 for Levin's contract.

The wily Mondt had laid his lines so well that prior to the Ali Baba-Levin match at the Meadowbrook Bowl in Newark, Pfeffer was convinced that Weismuller, Haft and Sandow were on the verge of declaring him out of the combination, and making Mondt their partner.

This little thought was put over on Pfeffer through the expediency of countless phone messages left at Mondt's hotel, which read:

"CALL ADAM WEISMULLER AT THE ALAMAC HOTEL."

Mondt also arranged with friends in Rochester, Columbus and Detroit, the home cities of Haft, Sandow, and Weismuller, to have telegrams filed from these cities to him, and signed with the names of Haft, Sandow and Weismuller.

Shortly after the double cross in Newark, Ali Baba, when interviewed by Dan Parker of the Daily Mirror, said:

“I thought there were only 40 thieves. Now I find there were 42.”

When informed of Ali Baba’s sentiments, Mondt threw his hands up in pretended horror, and said: “I hope Harry wouldn’t dare call wrestling promoters like Pfeffer and myself thieves.”

Pfeffer merely shrugged his shoulders, caressed his proboscis with the index finger, and said: “From dis I am conwinced.”

Mondt’s coup, however, split the wrestling trust wide open. Because he had not been in on the Ali Baba defeat, Paul Bowser notified “Toots” that in his book O’Mahoney was still World’s Champion, despite the fact that he had been defeated by Shikat. Rudy Dusek sided with Bowser and took his entire organization out of the Curley office, moving his belongings to the Hotel Lincoln, where he immediately began booking the smaller wrestling clubs, with the pronunciamento that Mondt and Curley were no longer his partners.

With Mondt controlling most of the topnotch matmen, and Dusek and Bowser also booking heavyweight grapplers, the situation by the Spring of 1937 finds Everett Marshall proclaiming himself wrestling king because he had defeated Ali Baba on June 29, 1936, in Columbus, Ohio, and had recognition in Illinois and Colorado as champion. Levin, in turn, was defeated by Dean Detton of Salt Lake City, in Philadelphia, September, 1936.

Perhaps the greatest influence toward the cleanup of wrestling took place late in August of 1936, when Lee Wycoff and “Strangler” Lewis, one the policeman for Levin, and the other the copper for Marshall, met at the N.Y. Hippodrome Sports Arena in a grueling two-hour shooting match. The bout had been ordered by the New York State Athletic Commission, with the solons designating the winner as challenger for Levin in an elimination. Lewis entered the ring confident he would make short shift of his younger and more wary adversary. Wycoff, too, came through the ropes oozing self-belief. Lewis had told his associates it would be a short and merry bout,

with “Strangler” the winner. Two hours later, both men fell out of the ring exhausted, and referee George Bothner called the affair a draw.

While Wycoff had not beaten Lewis, he demonstrated himself to be a capable and feared matman, with whom Nekoosa could not cope. Lewis’ failure to subdue Wycoff rankled more because Ed’s old manager, Sandow, had trained Wycoff for the bout, and supposedly shown Lee all of his former partner’s grappling tricks.

Discouraged after his failure to beat Wycoff, Lewis virtually retired from all wrestling competition and promotion. Before bowing out of the grappling game, however, he went into serious training at “Toots” Mondt’s request, and in September of 1936, in the basement of Mondt’s home in Glendale, California, Lewis and six others of the toughest wrestlers the game knows, locked grips with Dean Detton of Salt Lake City, Utah, a heavyweight just two years out of the amateurs. Detton pinned all his opponents in short order.

It was after the Detton tryout that this writer sat in on a conference and Mondt told Lewis:

“Back in the old days, Ed, we slept nights because we had you on top, a champion who could wrestle. Even Gotch and Stecher were fellows who could hold their own by fair means or foul, when called upon to do so. Now Levin has cleaned up Lopez and I’m matching Dave with Detton in Philadelphia. Detton will win that one certain, and after that we’ll have a champion who we know we can exploit properly and we won’t have to take any guff from anyone.”

After Detton won the crown from Levin, Mondt endeavored to bring about a friendly feeling between the various wrestling factions, by welding Sandow, Haft, Weismuller, Curley, Bowser, the Johnstons, Lou Daro and Jack Corcoran of Toronto, into one big organization. He was blocked in this effort by the refusal of Sandow, Ed White, Haft and Weismuller to cooperate.

A growing confidence in wrestling, with Detton as champion, seems to be increasing throughout North America. Rugged, capable, skilled, well-bred and intelligent, Detton harks back to the halcyon days of the late William Muldoon, according to oracle Hype Igoe of the New York Evening Journal. Certain it is that like Muldoon, Detton need take a back step to no man in a wrestling sense.

Detton demonstrated his confidence in his own ability early last winter when the Illinois and Missouri Commissions attempted to force him into matches with Everett Marshall.

On December 27, 1936, Detton filed the following wire from the Western Union office at 710 Seventh Avenue, New York City to:

Joe Triner, Chairman
Illinois Athletic Commission
Chicago, Ill.

Garrett Smalley, Chairman
Missouri Athletic Commission
Kansas City, Mo.

Replying to various wires and letters regarding my granting title bout to Challenger Everett Marshall let it be understood I am willing to defend my title against challenger Marshall anywhere providing terms are satisfactory stop You understand a Detton-Marshall bout is a promotional plum and several cities are bidding for it stop Have under consideration bona fide offers from Twentieth Century Club New York Ray Fabiani Philadelphia Lou Daro Los Angeles to defend my title against challenger Everett Marshall stop The most satisfactory financial offer will be accepted stop So far no bids have been received from your promoters stop Realize you have no financial interest in any promoters only want to clear up mat situation so assume you have no objection my accepting best financial offer for title defense against challenger Marshall you merely want bout held stop Illinois New York Missouri California Pennsylvania all want bout I have met all challengers in defense of my championship and intend doing so with

Challenger Marshall no exception stop I want to clean up all challengers and think in this case the promoter of a Detton-Marshall title bout should be a man of financial standing in whatever state held and both challenger and champion should be assured of impartial ring officials agreeable to both participants.

Dean Detton

Worlds Heavyweight Wrestling Champion

That Detton meant business and was in earnest he again demonstrated on January 3rd, 1937, when, not receiving a reply from the Illinois and Missouri Commissions, he dispatched the following letter to the Illinois Commission.

Detton's letter follows and gives a comprehensive picture of the wrestling business.

January 3, 1937

Mr. Jos. Triner,
Chairman, State Athletic Commission,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Triner:

The purpose of this letter is a definite and emphatic protest against the action of your commission in recognizing the winner of the forthcoming Marshall-McMillen match as world's heavyweight wrestling champion.

Some time in June of the past year, the various athletic commissions of the states of California, Missouri, Illinois, New York and Pennsylvania agreed, while attending the Louis-Schmeling boxing contest in New York City, to each designate a leading or No. 1 challenger for world titular honors in their respective states, and then by a process of elimination,

establish a bona fide heavyweight champion and thereby put a stop to the claims of sundry champions who have no right to the honor.

It is my understanding that New York named Ed "Strangler" Lewis, Pennsylvania selected Dean Detton, Illinois chose Jim McMillen, Missouri took George Zaharias and California named Vincent Lopez.

Before any of these eliminations could take place, Dave Levin, of New York, placed the situation in a further muddle by defeating Ali Baba, who had the real claim to the title, by reason of his defeat of Dick Shikat, who had previously defeated Danno O'Mahoney when the latter had general and international credit as world's champion. The Levin-Ali Baba match took place in Newark, N. J., June 12, 1936.

Immediately signing with Promoter Lou Daro, of Los Angeles, Levin agreed to meet Vincent Lopez in defense of his title claims, and eliminated Lopez, California's entry, from further consideration, when he defeated the latter for the California title, which, as far as California was concerned, meant the world's title.

Months before this situation arose, I was invited by Promoter Ray Fabiani, of Philadelphia, to enter a wrestling tournament, being held there and sponsored by the Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission. I entered the tournament and was the ultimate victor, defeating Ed "Strangler" Lewis in the finals, which eliminated Lewis as a contender for the world title under the system proposed by the various states named above. I further want to bring out to you that despite the fact that Everett Marshall was contacted by registered mail by the Pennsylvania Commission, both he and his manager not only failed to enter the tournament, but disregarded entirely the communication they received from Commissioner Joe Rainey of Pennsylvania.

Now, regarding the situation in Chicago. Promoter Fellman, of Chicago, who was attempting to clarify the Illinois tangle, negotiated with me for a match with McMillen last summer. I readily accepted this match and on or about August 10, 1936, posted a forfeit with your commission.

Now, may I again bring Marshall into the picture. A few days after my forfeit was posted to wrestle McMillen, Marshall met and defeated Ali Baba, and despite the fact that Baba had already been eliminated, by the Levin defeat, from all consideration, Marshall claimed the title when he won over Baba in Columbus.

At that time, your commission notified Marshall, or his manager by letter, a copy of which was forwarded to me by Ed White, of Chicago, that unless he agreed to meet either McMillen or myself, your commission would refuse to give any recognition whatsoever to his title claim. Following his procedure in Pennsylvania, Marshall completely ignored your communication, which, as it did in Philadelphia, eliminated him from further consideration in the title fight. He was given until September 15, 1936, to file an answer and when he failed to do so, there was only one course for Mr. Fellman and Mr. White to follow and that was a Detton-McMillen match, which was held and which resulted in a draw.

To progress further. On September 28, 1936, I met and defeated Dave Levin, in Philadelphia, which gave me recognition as champion in that state and further served to eliminate Levin from the title picture. This victory also gave me recognition in California. I followed this match with a defeat of George Zaharias in St. Louis, which not only eliminated Zaharias from titular honors but also gave me world championship recognition in Missouri. You will now note that every contender designated by the various states had been eliminated, with the exception of McMillen and myself.

Meanwhile, to digress, Marshall, invited to wrestle in New York by that commission, again followed in line with the policy he had taken in Pennsylvania and Illinois and refused to even answer the New York board's communication, so that body suspended him, and it is a matter of record that at this writing that suspension still stands.

Now let's return to the Chicago situation. After winning titular recognition in Pennsylvania and California and Missouri, Mr. Fellman and Mr. White asked me to wrestle in Chicago, and, in a match billed for the world's heavyweight championship, I met and defeated Chief Little Wolf. On

the same card, McMillen defeated Lewis. After both McMillen and myself won our matches, it was understood and told us, that we were to meet in Chicago for the undisputed heavyweight championship under the sanction of the Illinois Commission. Further, on the promise of such sanction, Mr. White drew from us an enormous amount of money for this purpose, claiming that he needed that money for Mr. Fellman or other large promoters who might be interested in bringing that match about.

I was absolutely dumbfounded when, recently, you wired me that I was suspended in your state for failure to go through with a McMillen match, this despite the fact that at no time were my representatives or myself notified about any such match being proposed. I so wired you in my reply and further asked you for details, which were not forthcoming from you. Instead, I received a very evasive letter, stating that I had made a verbal agreement with you to meet any contender you selected. In your same wire you notified me that I had run out of the McMillen match and took it for granted that I had, when in reality this was an absolute lie with no basis of truth, and then in the next statement you notified me that Marshall and McMillen were wrestling for the world's heavyweight championship.

Now, Mr. Triner, you and your commission are not going to get away with anything as raw as this very bold attempt to try and cheat and job me out of my hard and rightfully earned championship. Because I'm not going to sit idly by and watch your commission recognize a discredited heavyweight named Marshall, who has been condemned not only by your own commission but by those of Pennsylvania, New York and California, for his pointblank refusal to enter any legitimate tournaments in an effort to straighten out the title situation.

It was you, Mr. Triner, and not I, that went back on your word, for despite your assurances that Marshall was definitely out of the running, you, in some manner, permitted him to slyly post a forfeit without letting me know of it and then come out and boldly announce his match for the world title.

In the near future, I'm going to ask your commission for a hearing and I'm prepared to battle this thing to a finish. In conclusion, the reason the whole matter appears wrong to me is because even with your threats to suspend me, I haven't yet received an offer from any Chicago promoter to come there and wrestle any opponent—be it McMillen or anyone else.

Yours very truly,
Dean Detton,
World's Heavyweight Wrestling Champion.

The fearless attitude of Detton has provoked favorable comment everywhere from press and public and he bids fair to remain champion a long time.

Detton summed it up to the writer one night last winter when he said: "So far I've never been asked to lose a match or do anything crooked, so anything I hear about wrestling is only hearsay. However, I don't ask opponents to lie down to me and I'm in shape to wrestle at all times, so the Marshalls and others can come along whenever they wish."

Reviewing the wrestling picture through the pages of this book these are strange words indeed.

But this is getting to be a strange land, my dear Gaston.

Chapter 24

Vale!

Wrestling recompense far exceeds that obtained by other professional athletes but the penalty for their earnings is also far greater.

Disease dogs the footsteps of the modern pachyderms. Nightly jumps in trains, eating in out of the way restaurants, lack of proper rest and the strenuous schedules all contribute toward the sapping of a grappler's strength, and while countless wrestlers earn fortunes their lives at best, despite the programs, often tax the body beyond human endurance.

Some matmen die in the ring, others succumb from the shocks sustained while taking those trick falls and out of the ring dives, and others end up mumbling and spatting like punchy fighters who walk on their heels.

Stanley Stasiak was the greatest of all the modern villains who graced the wrestling ring. A roaring lion when once within the ropes, outside the arena Stanley showed the tenderness of a mother toward a new born babe. He died from blood poisoning after being cut during a bout in Worcester, Massachusetts, with Jack Sherry.

Steve Snozsky, another superman of the mat succumbed from an attack of locomotor ataxia, directly traced to injuries caused from falls taken during wrestling bouts.

The strenuous schedule which a champion is called upon to observe sapped the strength of Jim Browning, one time world's title holder, who died in June, 1936, after an operation for ulcers of the stomach.

Browning, though rated one of the toughest grapplers who held the title during the modern era of wrestling, spent the last few months of his life half blinded from the ravages of trachoma and in intense pain from the stomach ulcers. During the last months of his life Browning's weight fell from two hundred and thirty pounds to one hundred and forty. He could scarcely lift his hand when taken to Mayo Brothers Hospital at Rochester, Minnesota, in May of 1936.

Mike Romano, veteran grappler who held over from the Sandow era, collapsed in a Washington, D. C. ring one night in June, 1936, while engaged in a bout with Jack Donovan, a run of the mine grappler.

When ambulance surgeons arrived at the scene to treat him they pronounced Romano beyond human aid. He had died from athlete's heart, an ailment so common to other grapplers who follow the hard and strenuous schedules that participation in professional wrestling requires.

We pause at this point in our revelations of the machinations of the wrestling business to reveal the other side so that readers of this work won't think it's all peaches and cream for the neckbenders.

They, too, run hazardous risks in their efforts to please the public. At times their efforts lead to more serious consequences than injuries suffered by fighters, ball players or tennis stars. For it is sometimes more exacting to make a match interesting when the finish is a planned one than it would be to let the course of events develop.

Lansing McCurley, sports editor of the Philadelphia Daily News, presented the best argument in favor of the bonecrushers when on June 28th, 1936, he wrote:

I'd like to point out that you can't fix, by any means or manner, this cold gray man of the night we know as Death. You can't lodge the golden dollars of man's coinage in his bony palm, you can't buy betrayal from the hollow of his cavernous skull. What most wrestlers fake, if you really want to know, is that they like it all, that they can't be hurt, that they are supermen. Even

the tough Ernie Dusek said to me one night in all seriousness, "Look at me, Lanse, what a life I lead, cut and bruised and beaten if I win or lose or draw." It's a tough life, you fans, who make your living selling bonds or cigars or refrigerators or eight hours of mental exercise. Theirs is a life that leaves you with big ears that make people stare and talk below the ordinary tone and point and look quickly away when you catch them looking. It's a life that leaves you lopsided, with great white stripes of scar tissue across your face and body, with endless boils from endless bouts in endless ill-equipped dressing rooms, with endless worries and endless fights, until they all seem one worry and one match.

Your head is squeezed until the bees of a thousand hives drone you to sleep. Your very insides are flattened until your organs make great knots of pain against your ribs and your chest is full to breaking and your heart cramps and your eyes see black streaks and floating bubbles and myriad specks. Your arms are pulled out of their very sockets and your legs twisted into bows of pain. And the chances are 100 to 1 you go blind in the end and see only with the mind the bitterness of the might have been.

And you get what? A few dollars that you spend on trains and hotels and doctors and rare vacations, or send home to the wife and kids like other married men send home their money. Only you can't have any fun because you have to be fit and ready. You get great gashes over the head from ring posts and cracked bones and torn muscles.

You get noises in the head and funny spells. And you get shouts and accusations of fake and in the bag and one hundred and one other epithets.

Fake or not, the fact remains the bonecrushers do suffer injuries, and as Lanse McCurley observes: "You can't beat death." He doesn't work programs!

There is, of course, the serious side and the comic to all mat bouts. When Mike Romano died he took many a secret to the grave with him and though many of the matmen can't grapple worth talking about, yet in a profession so packed with trickery and double crossing, the fact remains

that the public likes and supports wrestling despite the many smelly scandals with which the sport has been identified during the years past.

Wrestling is in its second childhood. Matdom took advantage of the slowing up in boxing interest and when the fighters began to wrestle, the wrestlers began to fight. Some of the fans know they are watching a show and feel certain of it when they witness the hokum and byplay between mat clowns, but when the going is rough and exciting they are less doubtful.

Wrestling, according to the theatrical trade paper, Variety, has an edge in the human spectacle it offers. Huge two hundred pounders, wallowing around the ring, flying through the air from human catapults, and landing heavily and noisily on domes and spines is a sight. Through this flash wrestling has its advantage over boxing.

A bad wrestling match can't be as bad as a poor boxing bout. In a poor wrestling match there is always the heft and sometimes much more to laugh at.

The big pachyderms possess a natural comedy element lacking in other sports. The antics inside the ropes, the postures, and gestures and the grimaces are funny.

The apparent cruelty of the sport appeals to men. They roar when a victim's head is apparently caught in a strangling arm vice. The women fans howl, too. Those fine looking college men in the mat game account for the feminine draw.

Bending an opponent's foot back until it seems to touch a bald headed man's conk in the first row is one of grappling's most appetizing gestures.

They struggle, gasp, squirm, toss, roll, yelp and grunt to keep the shoulders off the mat and after a good deal of the "Toots" Mondt showmanship formula, the shoulders touch and it's all over, not including the shouting.

It must be a pleasure for a wrestler to go home at night, slip into the soft hay, and lay both shoulders on the mattress without worrying about the referee slapping an opponent on the back as a token of victory.

So next time you see the mat harlequins bouncing around the canvas don't take it too seriously.

And remember you never can tell when there's going to be an epochal wrestling double cross. It has happened before and will happen again. Faction against clique and trust against small fry.

The fight goes merrily on—

And so as Thackeray says:

The play is done; the curtain drops, slow falling to the prompter's bell and when he's laughed and said his say he shows, as he removes his mask, a face that's anything but gay.

Au plaisir de vous revoir!